

MCKOY, ESSIE MANLEY, Ed.D. A Study of Elementary Principals' Perceptions of Accountability and Leadership in an Era of High Stakes Testing. (2012)
Directed by Dr. Carl Lashley. 155 pp.

The most significant pressures facing school principals in this decade are accountability and the need for them to lead effectively. To better understand these challenges, the purpose of this research was to ascertain some of the perceptions of elementary school principals toward accountability, examine how accountability has affected their leadership role, determine which leadership frameworks most often produced accountability success, and how they manage their perceptions to lead to success.

The literature speaks in specific terms both about accountability and the presented leadership frameworks. There is minimal research that examines the perceptions of elementary school principals and the dominant framework in which they operate to create success. In this qualitative study a forum was created inviting a purposeful sample of elementary school principals serving different types of schools.

An interview-based approach was the primary research method used to gather data using the principles of grounded theory. Ten elementary school principals shared their perceptions of accountability and how they manage it, the effects of accountability, and what they thought to be their dominate leadership framework used to create success. Half of the participants were principals from highly impacted schools and the other half were from non-highly impacted schools.

These participants' perceptions inform the reader about the experiences and perspectives of the different aspects of accountability and leadership in hopes of creating

a deeper understanding. They did not simply share about these experiences—they allowed the reader to gain insight. Consequently, leadership issues were not viewed in unrealistic ways but as the reality of specific experiences that transpired in the lives of participants.

While policy makers and school leaders focus heavily on academic performance for students, participants demonstrated that educating students is about far more than accountability. The whole child concept and other factors impacting academic achievement must be taken into consideration when creating accountability guidelines and mandates. Leaders who have listened and understood these experiences can be a voice of reason for policymakers and others helping to create accountability models. The experiences shared from this group of school principals demonstrate how this could be accomplished.

A STUDY OF ELEMENTARY PRINCIPALS' PERCEPTIONS OF
ACCOUNTABILITY AND LEADERSHIP IN AN
ERA OF HIGH STAKES TESTING

by

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A Dissertation Submitted to
the Faculty of The Graduate School at
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education

Greensboro
2012

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APPROVAL PAGE

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. Carl Lashley, my dissertation chair, for his guidance, insight, and advice during this entire process. He taught me to strive for excellence. I would also like to thank my other dissertation committee members, Dr. Rick Reitzug, Dr. Larry Coble, Dr. Craig Peck, and Dr. Camille Cooper who gave their time and effort to assist in the completion of this dissertation and contributed significantly to my professional growth.

A special thanks to all of my friends, family members, and colleagues for their patience and words of encouragement when times were challenging. I thank my sisters, Pamela Thomas and Shanette Miller, for sharing that I am their role model and in helping me to realize the impact of their words. Thanks to my parents, John and Essie Manley, for instilling determination, a sense of excellence in striving to achieve, and the belief that through Christ Jesus—all things are possible. I thank my children, Marcus and Shardae, for their assistance and the times they sacrificed while I worked on completing my dissertation. Most of all, I thank my husband, Linwood, for his encouragement, belief in me, and sacrifices during the past years. With his constant support, devotion, love, and understanding we accomplished this goal together. I dedicate this work to my husband, children, mother, father, and sisters and give supreme thanks to God for all things.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The perceptions elementary school principals have about accountability and leadership in this era of high stakes testing are more critical today than ever in the history of public education. Principals are held responsible for promoting school reform to increase student achievement (Fullan, 2001b). They play an essential role in school reform because they have the ability to impact decisions about curriculum and instruction as well as other components of school leadership and school reform. However, most studies show that principals have no direct effect on student achievement but contribute indirectly (Sunderman, Kim, & Orfield, 2005).

The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001, also known as the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), is a federal law that is intended to improve education for all children. It holds schools responsible for results, gives parents greater choices, and promotes teaching methods that work (Lyons & Algozzine, 2006). All schools must set academic standards for what every child should know. School districts must measure the progress of schools in meeting those standards. Each state has to set academic standards and yearly goals for achievement. They are expected to make adequate yearly progress toward achieving those standards. By the year 2014, all children should be achieving at their state's proficiency level in reading, math, and science (Tucker & Coddling, 2002).

In the state of North Carolina, tests in the third, fourth, and fifth grades are given to students in reading, math, and science at the elementary school level. Schools are given report cards on how their students performed on the required state assessments. If adequate yearly progress has not been made, then schools may face sanctions ranging from addressing areas of improvements to being taken over by the state government (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2004).

The United States Department of Education under President Barack Obama released the Blueprint of Reform for The Reauthorization of the Elementary and Second Education Act (U.S Department of Education, 2010). The blueprint builds on the significant reforms already made in response to the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 and on NCLB of 2001. The four major focus areas cited are:

1) improving teacher and principal effectiveness to ensure that every classroom has a great teacher and every school has a great leader; 2) providing information to families to help them evaluate and improve their children's schools, and for educators to help them improve their students' learning; 3) implementing college- and career-ready standards and developing improved assessments aligned with those standards; and 4) improving student learning and achievement in America's lowest-performing schools by providing intensive support and effective interventions. (U.S. Department of Education, 2010)

With all the local, state, and national accountability standards, school principals must have a clear understanding of accountability and know the in-depth accountability mandates at all three levels. This is critical for the success of their school when addressing student achievement. The principal is a key player in sustaining the sense of success for all. It is simply not enough just to know the components of accountability and

have school principals to operate from a framework that yields success. Principals must examine their perceptions and share with others the effects of accountability and think about leadership frameworks that impact their ability to lead effectively.

In this study, a purposeful sample of ten elementary school principals provided insights into their own experience and perceptions as school leaders. It is easy to formulate one's own perceptions about accountability when not serving in the role of school principals. Hopefully, this study will provide another lens for this analysis.

Five of these elementary school principals serve in highly impacted schools and five serve non-highly impacted schools. Highly impacted schools are schools where a large percentage of the students receive free and reduced lunch, the mobility rate is high, a large percentage of the students are performing below grade level as determined by local and state testing, the school has a large English as a Second Language student population, and students are faced with environmental and other social and emotional challenges. Of course non-highly impacted schools do not have these factors.

Equity Plus schools are schools that are designated as having a student population with at least 75% or more on free and reduced lunch. This designation is set by district leaders in the district in which these schools are located in conjunction with state, federal, and local guidelines. Again, this designation is determined by the local school system in which I conducted my research.

U.S. school accountability standards mandate that all students will meet academic standards no matter what other factors are present in a school's setting or a child's life. Federal legislation, particularly the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, requires schools

and students to meet standards at the same rate and all age groups to achieve on state-mandated tests. Little consideration is given to challenges students face. They have very limited time to overcome considerable barriers such as social, economic, academic, language, and other influential factors. The participants in this study echoed this very sentiment.

It is not enough to only hear the perceptions of school principals when designing accountability standards. School leaders must take into account all factors that impact student achievement and create a model of accountability that captures the progression of students' learning. If more schools are to make progress, a new way of measuring student learning must be developed and embedded into the accountability mandates that currently exist.

Rationale and Perspectives of the Researcher

I served as a principal of a school in North Carolina where over eight-hundred students were considered at-risk and highly impacted by poverty and other factors. Many of the students face academic, social, and other challenges which impact their achievement. One-hundred percent of the student population received free and reduced lunch and over 50% are receiving English as a Second Language Services. Due to such challenges, the school is considered to be an Equity Plus School as well as a Title I school with a school-wide Title I program.

In spite of all the labels placed upon the school and students, our school and students have made incredible academic gains on the North Carolina accountability assessments and have made Adequately Yearly Progress in previous years as mandated

by No Child Left Behind. As I have led the school for the past seven and a half years, I have constantly been encountered with questions from elementary school principals about perceptions of accountability and leading in this era of high stakes testing. Usually, these principals want me to share my perspectives, the impacts of accountability, and the leadership framework responsible for my school's success.

I realized in my desire to continue to serve as an effective school principal and make an impactful difference in the field of education, I needed to explore the perceptions of other elementary school principals about accountability and leadership. While I believe my own sense of commitment must be used as an instrument for providing others with helpful leadership techniques, it is powerful when the perspectives of many are shared. Therefore, my professional motivation was to explore their viewpoints and for them to share some of their beliefs in order to assist all principals with leading more effectively. It is critical not only to know the perceptions principals have about accountability but also to know the implications, the leadership framework that principals believe to make the most difference in student achievement, and to gain insights across different types of schools in order to share comprehensively.

Since I currently serve as a principal, it is important for me to understand and disclose my positionality from the onset of this study. According to Peshkin (1988), one's subjectivity is like a garment that cannot be removed. While I am aware that conducting research in one's own organization is filled with hazards, it was also filled with the desire to conduct a quality study that acknowledges my subjectivity in order to monitor it against the impact on the inquiry process and the outcome of the data.

Knowing how passionate I was about this study and how I wanted to seek as much knowledge as possible in order to assist other school principals, I proceeded cautiously. I knew the benefits of the knowledge that I would gain would exceed the potential risks and indeed, it has done just that!

Problem Statement

Accountability is a key component of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, and school principals are responsible for student outcomes and achievement. Although principals are responsible, little is known about elementary principals' perceptions of accountability and leadership in this era of high stakes testing.

There is a wealth of research that continues to mount about effective school leaders, practices for successful principals, and leadership frameworks. While this information is critical to the overall success of schools and student achievement, even more important is the need for more research about principal's perceptions, how these perceptions affect their role, how they manage, and what frameworks are perceived to lead to accountability success. The school principal is ultimately responsible for the results of their school's achievement data. Therefore, a principal has to have an on-going wealth of skills and abilities to be successful and navigate through accountability in the 21st century.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to explore the perceptions of elementary school principals about accountability. More specifically, I will address the following questions:

1. What are the perceptions of elementary principals towards accountability?
2. How has accountability affected the leadership role of a school principal?
3. What leadership framework do school principals most often perceive is necessary for accountability success?
4. How do leaders manage their perceptions in this age of high stakes accountability to create success?

The results of this study will help school principals gain insights into what they should be doing to lead more effectively.

Overview of the Study

To better understand the focus outlined in the purpose statement, I conducted a qualitative interview-based study involving elementary school principals. First I reviewed the relevant literature regarding perceptions of school principals about accountability and accountability components, effective school leaders and their practices, and specific leadership frameworks. Next, I engaged the principals in sharing their experiences and perspectives about accountability. Through interviews and the sharing of relevant data, I invited participants who serve highly impacted and non-highly impacted schools to share their journey of leadership. I analyzed their shared thoughts looking for themes to emerge that would inform school leaders about perceptions, implications on their leadership abilities, and which leadership frameworks would influence their success. Once commonalities were identified, I compiled their perspectives by themes. In essence, I provided a forum in which participants could be heard through sharing in-depth. Finally, I interpreted the information shared by participants and I communicated my insight into

the experiences shared. This enabled me to participate in a meaningful and authentic process that was in fact already created by the participants themselves.

In the next chapter, a literature review focuses on No Child Left Behind, some of the characteristics of effective leaders, practices that successful school principals utilize, leadership frameworks that are examined in this study, and the significance of this study to school leaders. Chapter III focuses on an introduction to the research questions, the research design and the overall data collection process. Chapter IV involves the analysis of the data as it relates to the perceptions elementary principals have about accountability, how accountability affects their leadership role, and the leadership framework in which they believe contributes to their success. The final chapter addresses the interpretation of the data and the implications of this research.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

While literature exists on topics of school principals' perceptions about NCLB accountability, a small number of qualitative studies have been done to date about elementary principal's perceptions and about how accountability has affected their role. In addition, several research studies have been done about leadership frameworks, but few about frameworks that lead to accountability success with elementary school principals.

The review of professional literature that follows is intended to serve several purposes. First, it is important to provide background knowledge to the reader regarding accountability, characteristics and practices of effective school leaders, and leadership frameworks. Also, the review demonstrates how varied and complex the factors are that impact the success of a school. In addition, important terms are defined so the reader can understand them individually as well as how they relate to one another. Finally, the review of literature sheds light on the fact that the majority of work conducted on this topic does not share the perspectives of elementary principals themselves nor take into account their leadership experiences. Finally, this review demonstrates to policymakers the need to modify the current accountability requirements as identified in No Child Left Behind.

There is a high degree of variation in how school principals perceive NCLB accountability. Principals' attention and awareness is drawn to the provisions of NCLB (Ladd & Zelli, 2002). Some even suggest that some school principals are motivated by accountability. Principal's motivation is stimulated not only by awareness of NCLB but also by the expectations that actions could affect whether goals are met and if not, whether or not consequences could be forthcoming (LeFloch, Taylor, & Thomsen, 2005). These consequences could result in school principals losing their jobs.

Principals perceive that schools with higher percentages of middle and upper income students benefit more from all the accountability policy than schools that are considered in need of the most improvement. The study indicated that demanding accountability without providing schools with substantially more resources will not lead to sustainable improvement. In order to avoid detrimentally impacting low-performing schools, they must be provided with additional resources to enhance teacher quality and engage in meaningful professional development to improve instruction (Spillane & Diamond, 2004).

Principals usually have a core concept of the components of NCLB and can articulate ways to share how it affects their school. They generally know about adequate yearly progress, sanctions, NCLB requirements for supplemental educational services, highly qualified teachers, safe harbor, corrective action, and general terminology in the law. In order for accountability mechanisms to make a difference, school principals must be aware of sanctions and perceive them to be salient (LeFloch et al., 2005).

The following subsections convey the history of NCLB, the accountability components, impacts of NCLB on education, principal's concerns about accountability, and the viewpoints of the general public. All of these are relevant to what school principals should know so that they can form perceptions based on facts. In addition, highly effective schools must have highly effective leaders in order to attain positive accountability results. Therefore, it is critical for school principals to know what the research says about effective school leaders as well as what the research reveals about successful schools and successful school principals.

No Child Left Behind Act

According to Emery (2008), the ideas in No Child Left Behind were initiated by a bipartisan bandwagon of standards based advocates in 1989 but the law did not pass until 2001. Some of these advocates were the top three hundred chief executive officers of businesses in the country. They agreed that each state legislature needed to adopt legislation that would impose outcome-based education, high expectations for all children, rewards and penalties for individual schools, greater school-based decision making, and align staff development with these action items (Sunderman et al., 2005).

By 1995, they refined their agenda to nine essential components, the first four being state standards, state tests, sanctions, and the transformation of teacher education programs (Emery, 2008). In 2000, an interlocking network of business associations, corporate foundations, governor's associations, and non-profits and educational institutions successfully persuaded sixteen state legislatures to adopt the first three components of their high stakes testing agenda (Kirst, 2000). This network included the

Education Trust, Annenberg Center, Harvard Graduate School, Public Agenda, Achieve, Inc., Education Commission of the States, the Broad Foundation, Institute for Educational Leadership, federally funded regionally laboratories, and most newspaper editorial boards (Kowalski & Lasley, 2009).

The federal government got more involved and aligned the federal educational policy with this initiative and made major reforms to public education. In 2002, former President George Bush signed the landmark Act known as No Child Left Behind into law (U.S. Department of Education, 2003). He and other policymakers wanted to ensure that all students would have a better chance to learn, excel, and to live out their dreams. Many legislators regarded the law as the most sweeping education reform in decades (Emery, 2008).

Accountability Components

The intent of the NCLB legislation and AYP is to steadily improve states' focus on student and school performance (Popham, 2004). While AYP has served many states, some states are looking beyond AYP to models that may even further improve the validity and reliability of their systems (e.g., growth and value-added models; Choi, 2006).

At the center of this issue is a problematic relationship between external and internal control and implications for organizational change and improvement. NCLB relies on data for annual student achievement and these scores determine the future of schools (Davis, Darling-Hammond, Meyerson, & LaPointe, 2005). There is a strong demand for proven results and comprehensive evaluations. Of course, these mandates

have moved the role of the principal to the frontline. If schools and districts are not successful in raising achievement levels of all students, sanctions will be imposed and these schools and districts will lose control of their schools and districts (Popham, 2004). Sanctions such as schools in school improvement status, corrective action, and restructuring are all components of NCLB.

Detailed information about the performance of schools in the district and subgroups of children must be readily available (Holme, 2002). The ramifications of performance can be a domino effect. For example, real estate agents can use these reports to answer customer questions about school districts and neighborhoods. Teachers can examine this information before deciding to apply for a position in a school, district, or state. Superintendents can use this information to determine which principals are running successful schools and which are not. School boards can use this information to evaluate superintendents. Voters might use this information to evaluate school boards. Industry can use state report cards to make decisions about where to locate new facilities and the impact of accountability goes on and on (Holme, 2002). Today, schools are judged by more than the appearance of the facility, or new books, or volunteers. They are judged by the ability to teach all students, and schools that are successful may get an influx of students because of school choice provisions. Schools that are not successful will face sanctions for not making adequately yearly progress (Holme, 2002).

Moreover, the requirements for passing AYP targets have become more stringent. Schools are required to demonstrate that every subgroup of students meets AYP targets for both participation and proficiency in both mathematics and reading (LeFloch &

Thomsen et al., 2005). NCLB also bolsters the consequences associated with consecutive years of AYP failure. Schools that miss AYP targets for two consecutive years are identified for improvement and must offer Title I choice. Those that fail three consecutive years must offer supplemental educational services. Failure to meet AYP targets for four or more consecutive years results in designations of corrective action and restructuring, for which the sanctions stiffen each subsequent year (Popham, 2004).

Long before No Child Left Behind became law, educational organizations and the educational profession championed underlying principles and goals for instructional leadership and principals to commitment to high academic standards (Fullan, 2002). They encouraged school leaders to disaggregate data to plan for the implementation of curriculum. In addition, schools sought well-qualified and well-trained teachers and paraprofessionals and created support systems for students who struggled academically (Elmore & Bruney, 1998).

Impacts on Education

Even before NCLB, Linn (2000) suggested that the current system of accountability at the federal level generated a significant amount of debate regarding its impact on education. At the inception of implementing the components of NCLB, it presented challenges for schools and districts to ensure that all of students meet state standards for proficiency by the end of the 2013-2014 school year (Spellings, 2005). At the heart of NCLB is an increased emphasis on accountability. The law mandates testing in reading, math, and science for students in grades three through eight and that all subgroups of students make adequate yearly progress toward the state's proficiency

levels in these areas. NCLB affects all public schools and districts that receive federal Title I funds. These schools must report the progress of students (Linn & Haug, 2002).

Over the past ten years, responding both to federal legislation and local pressure to improve learning, states developed or amended their accountability systems. Virtually every state now has standards for student learning, most have aligned student assessment programs with those standards, and many have developed data collection and reporting systems to support their accountability decision making (Spellings, 2005). To meet the requirements of the NCLB, states have modified or developed accountability systems to measure schools and districts via a status model of accountability (adequate yearly progress or AYP).

There is no doubt that NCLB will have an effect on schools and principal leadership in this high stakes testing era. Within the past eleven years, NCLB has changed public education, altering the practices of schools and districts across the United States. Accountability for student achievement and overall school success has never been greater (Wohlstetter, Datnow, & Park, 2008).

Principal Concerns

According to LeFloch et al. (2005) many principals voiced concerns about NCLB and the outside factors that influence performance in schools. Many believe that this accountability model does not help them deal with factors such as home environment, discipline problems, lack of parental involvement, high mobility, high poverty, community issues such as unemployment, the rate of sickness, poor health care, segregation, and children with poor attitudes about school (Fullan, 2002). In addition,

NCLB does not properly address the learning and assessment needs of students with disabilities and English Language Learners.

Principals feel as though regulations about highly qualified teachers pose problems for schools. There are good teachers who just cannot pass the test. In other words, they can relate to kids, know the content knowledge, produce good test results, but cannot make a passing score to become certified. Therefore, a school is reported as not having 100% highly qualified teachers. Although NCLB is intended to provide support for schools that face the most severe challenges, school principals do not always perceive this support to be adequate (Emery, 2008).

As NCLB has increased accountability in schools all across this nation, educational leaders and particularly school principals in the state of North Carolina have increased their attention to leadership responsibilities. According to Lyons and Algozzine (2006) school principals in North Carolina have focused more on the following: monitoring of student achievement, alignment of curriculum to testing, assignment of teachers to classes and grade levels, instructional time allocation, and remediation and tutorial opportunities for students. Goals, objectives, responsibilities, and programs that have been targeted for change are driven mainly by school administrators.

Participants in their study viewed components such as measures of school effectiveness, school safety standards, financial bonuses, and expectations and promotion standards favorably (Lyons & Algozzine, 2006). The negative perceptions were about the sanctions applied to schools that do not meet proficiency (Lyons & Algozzine, 2006) reported that another major negative perception was schools' testing requirements for

Limited English Proficiency and special education students. These schools would receive negative status designation labels because it would be a challenge for them to meet the requirements. Principal's roles have shifted more towards student achievement.

Accountability is now at the school level since the passing of NCLB.

Public Views

Even though reform and concerns about outcomes and accountability have been a focal point for the past twenty years, principals have been the driving force in implementing these changes (Elmore & Bruney, 1998). The general public believes that the President should rely on education leaders for advice on improving education. Parents are more interested in the work student produce and teacher observations of their children than test scores. These same beliefs and views resonate with many public school administrators (Fullan, 2006).

Effective School Leaders

The message from two decades of research on effective schools indicates that great schools have great leaders (McEwan, 2003), no matter the challenges they have to address. Yet finding highly effective leaders is not easy in the age of high stakes testing and accountability. Leithwood and Riehl (2005) suggested that there are core practices necessary for principals' success in any context. These essential practices are setting the direction for the school, developing people and redesigning the school, and providing a framework for understanding the work of the leaders within the school.

Murphy and Louis (1999) found key components that effective school leaders consistently demonstrated in the face of all the challenges that they encounter. Successful

principals established an intense focus on learning and communicate its centrality in everything they do. Their high expectations combined with a sense of urgency to focus attention on learning for all subgroups of students, including the economically disadvantaged, racial and ethnic minorities, students with disabilities, and English language learners. No excuses override their commitment to student learning. Over the past several decades, a growing body of research on the work of school principals has made it increasingly clear that leadership matters when it comes to improving student achievement (Fullan, 2001b; Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2004). Quality leadership is particularly important in schools serving youngsters living in poverty.

Leadership within a school should be distributed throughout the school rather than invested in one person, the principal (Pounder & Merrill, 2001). These researchers believe that no one person should provide direct oversight for all school dimensions and activities. Elmore (2000) pointed out that the real work of reform ultimately occurs in the classroom, where the teachers interact with the students. Elmore suggested that principals cannot directly control these interactions but can guide in order to enhance the skills and knowledge and hold individuals accountable.

Characteristics of Effective Leaders

In the early 90's effective school leaders understand that they were in a position to mobilize others by articulating and modeling core values that support a challenging and successful education for all; establishing a persistent, public focus on learning at the school, classroom, community, and individual levels; working with others to set

ambitious standards for learning; and demonstrating and inspiring shared responsibility and accountability for student outcomes (Leithwood, 1994).

Effective school leaders set a tone of mutual trust and respect among teachers, students, parents, and community members. They take deliberate action to understand their school communities and form partnerships that focus on learning both inside and outside of the school. These leaders garner the full range of resources available for their schools, and they develop alliances to proactively seek support for student and professional learning goals. Moreover, they deeply understand effective instructional strategies and help teachers learn them. Indeed, they create structures and time for teachers to collaborate, examine student work together, identify instructional improvement strategies, and learn from one another. They frequently visit classrooms and coach classroom teachers in how to analyze student achievement data so that they can make more effective instructional decisions. These leaders act strategically to do the following:

- define and guide needed improvements in teaching and learning.
- identify teacher-leaders who have the potential to guide and support others' learning.
- create opportunities to share responsibility and leadership for learning.
- make workplace improvements that contribute to improving instruction and learning build organizational coherence.

- and engender confidence among students and teachers that, individually and together, they will successfully achieve their learning goals and sustain continuous improvement over time (Leithwood, 1994).

According to Andrews and Soder (1987), principals must obtain human resources, be visible, be good communicators, and provide instructional resources. Principals must create an atmosphere of trust, build relationships, model on-going learning and continual success, promote teacher leadership and collaboration, hold high expectations, and get stakeholders to be involved. These are all characteristics that principals need in order to be successful.

Practices for Successful School Principals

In the early 1980s, researchers began to document the attributes of successful schools (Pechman & Fiester 1996). These successful schools were characterized by students making substantial progress in their ability to acquire proficient reading and math skills and develop higher order thinking skills.

According to Cawelti (2000), the first priority should be that school principals have a comprehensive focus on multiple factors. Principals must embrace the idea of doing things differently and all at the same time in order to achieve critical mass and make effective systemic changes. Practices most often revealed in schools that are successful included the principal developing a culture of high expectations and care for all students, creating a safe and disciplined school environment, possessing strong instructional leadership abilities, recruiting employees who are hard-working, committed,

and able to teach, and center the curriculum focus on academic achievement that emphasizes math and reading.

Common Practices and Expectations

Some of the common practices prevalent in high performing schools are: (a) an increase in the amount of instructional time devoted to learning, (b) on-going diagnostic assessments that measure student learning, (c) parents as partners in the learning process, (d) professional development that constantly looks at ways of improving student achievement, and (e) collaboration among teachers and staff.

Cawelti (2000) suggested that the culture of high expectations needs to be shared by the teachers, staff, and students. Everyone in the school community must believe that students can succeed and allow this belief to manifest in the day-to-day operation that all children can achieve and succeed academically. Much of the research indicated the presence of such a culture as necessary or even the dominant theme in making it possible for a school to succeed (Barth et al., 1999, Kannapel & Clements, 2005).

School principals should make sure that this belief system of high expectations is rooted in tangible and measurable goals and communicated in concrete ways. These goals must be achievable and lend themselves to a common ideology such that the school has a common unity and sense of identity (Jesse, Davis, & Pokorny, 2004). The culture of high expectations is embedded in a caring and nurturing environment where adults and students treat each other with respect. Relationships are paramount and connecting with students is a crucial factor (Haberman, 1999a). McGee (2004) found that high performing

schools attend to health and safety, ensuring that the students have nutritional meals and access to health, dental, and counseling care.

School Environment

Principals should ensure that their students have a safe and disciplined environment. An environment where behavior is respectful of people, property, and self is the norm. Carter (2000) credited the focus on achievement as the key to discipline and believed that a positive environment models for the students, self-control, self-reliance, and self-esteem.

Leaders have the ability to impact not only a school environment but the entire school community. They can pour knowledge into each mind by teaching the curriculum, stir souls by building character, create morals and values in others by setting examples, establish healthy physical living techniques by implementing programs to meet wellness mandates, and the list goes on (Barth, 1990). Leaders have the ability to be all inclusive and the knowledge to set the expectations for a comprehensive school environment that meets the ever changing needs of our students and communities. They must be able to keep all the components working in conjunction with each other and be able to coordinate the undetached components and integrate into the whole so that it is all aligned (Cawelti, 2000).

Principal Leadership

Principal leadership is always important to high performance within schools. Principals are key players in sustaining the sense of a culture of success for all. The

element of a strong principal who holds everyone accountable to high standards is the most notable factor in creating and maintaining a high performing school (Carter, 2000).

Some researchers differ in how crucial the principal's role is and in their definition of the preferred leadership style. Jesse et al. (2004) noted a more collaborative leadership style. Kannapel and Clements (2005) were surprised to find that most principals lead by non-authoritarian style. Carter (2000) emphasized that effective principals decide on how to spend the money, what people to hire, and what needs to be taught.

No matter the details of how to establish a culture of high expectations, one thing for certain is that the principal must be known and seen as the instructional leader (Foriska, 1994). Principals should consult, collaborate, be supportive, and encourage teachers to make the best use of their knowledge and skills toward the purpose of improving student achievement.

Principals play an important role in creating great schools and helping students succeed. They help set the vision, guide instruction, create the budget, unite the staff, and lead the drive for change and results. A principal's job is a mix of small details and big ideas as well as crisis management and long-range planning. It is very easy to get caught up in the day-to-day task of managing, but one must focus on learning. A growing body of research indicated that there is a strong link between a high performing principal and a high performing school (Lauer, 2001). The high performing principal is focused on the alignment and quality of instruction across the school (Tucker & Coddling, 2002).

Principals who are instructional leaders create a vision for instruction and learning, inspire the faculty, collaborate in developing the vision, analyze student performance data, decide on areas of focus for improvement, recognize good classroom instruction, assess the quality of instructional materials, coach the staff with a focus on student learning, and evaluate the entire instructional system to assure alignment (Tucker & Coddling, 2002). Elmore (2000) pointed out several habits of a true instructional leader. These habits should be embedded in the day-to-day routine of a school principal's responsibilities. They are: (a) conduct regular classroom visits, (b) provide motivation to the staff, (c) find ways to support struggling students, (d) develop ways to enhance the skills of all teachers, (e) create a welcoming environment for parents and guests, and (f) keep the lines of communication open with all stakeholders.

The school principal puts a strong focus on academic achievement and instruction (Barth et al., 1999). Schools that consistently produce high results use standards to guide school activity, design curriculum and instruction, assess student progress, and assess teacher effectiveness. The entire school focuses consistently on academics and instruction. More time is allotted for reading and math instruction, and a focus is placed on the basic skills (Carter, 2000; Cawelti, 2000). These schools do not stop with basic skills but also placed an emphasis on developing higher order thinking skills (Barth et al., 1999). Principals create programs to develop reading habits in students and offer curricula enriched by sports, arts, and music (Haberman, 1999a).

Expectations for Hiring

Hiring and training of teachers is known as the principal's most critical responsibility (Carter, 2000). Researchers reveal that principals should focus on hiring and cultivating the best teachers. Lauer (2001) believed that teachers in high performing schools embrace a culture of high expectations for all and committed to seeing that all children achieve. Principals and teachers love learning and relate to their students well, work long hours, have high morale, and have a strong sense of devotion to their work. Principals look for teachers with the right attitudes and beliefs about children and learning. These are just a few of the components for principals who are on the road toward becoming leaders in high performing schools.

Principals assemble a staff of innovative, passionate people who share in the desire to do what is best for children at all costs. They know that having the right people on board is paramount. A great school is built on the foundation of a mission to serve children and prepare them for a successful life in a changing world. In order to give students the tools they need to live productive lives, schools must have remarkable teachers (Jahan, 1999). This can be accomplished in two ways: hiring the best teachers and awakening the greatness within the teachers who are already at the school. Some school principals will go to great lengths to recruit dynamic people who share the desire to change the lives of children. Recruiting and hiring great teachers is one of the most crucial jobs of school principals. Finding great teachers means not settling for simple interviewing but getting out into the community and searching for people who have the potential to impact the lives of children in positive ways. Hiring dynamic individuals is

just the beginning of creating the school culture, but it is definitely important. It is imperative to be able to awaken the greatness within the people within a school by fostering an environment where teachers can reach their personal best and give their best each day (Jantzi & Leithwood, 1996).

Collins (2001) insisted that great leaders view their organizational plan like that of a journey. They do not decide where to drive their bus and then go out and find people to ride. Instead, great principals find the right people to make the journey with them and they make sure they put those people in the right seats on the bus. The right people are an organization's greatest asset and school principals are committed to finding the best people to accompany them on their journey. School leaders search for those teachers that believe in the power of education for children. Leaders will be committed to finding people that share in a passion for teaching and learning and who are willing to take the journey with them, no matter how treacherous the roads (Kannapel & Clements, 2005).

Finding the right people to take the journey is crucial, but it is only one facet of administration. The school principal is charged with guiding the staff to articulate a mission that supports the goals of the district. Strong school leaders encourage every staff member to take part in creating a mission for the school. In order for everyone to believe in the mission and live the mission, they must be a part of the mission (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1999b). A schools' mission must be centered around the students that it serves and must be based on the core beliefs of the staff. In his book, *Good to Great*, Collins (2001) refers to the hedgehog concept. The hedgehog concept suggested that great organizations focus on the one thing they know they can be the best at and work towards being the best

at all costs. It seems like a very simple concept, but when a large organization such as a school is faced with obstacles and hardships that cause it to stray from the core mission, it is easy to lose sight of the core goals (Lambert, 1998). It is the charge of the school leader to keep the staff focused on the mission through clear and consistent collaboration. A school leader must never stray from the core beliefs embodied in the adopted mission. The school leader knows how important it is to constantly bring the staff back to the mission, what the staff believes, and what they want to do for children (Lambert, 2002).

Leadership Frameworks

Leadership frameworks that are necessary for accountability success will be a part of this study. School principals will share their thoughts about instructional, transformational, integrated, and moral leadership frameworks. While it is important to provide a definition of each framework, it is also important to provide a definition of leadership. The following is used throughout much of today's educational literature to describe school leadership.

Leadership is a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal (Northouse, 2007). Leaders carry out this process by applying their leadership knowledge and skills in a conceptual structure that leads to a leadership framework.

Instructional leadership is actions taken or delegated to others to promote growth in student learning (Greenfield, 1997). School principals focus on curriculum, assessment, and the day-to-day instructional delivery. Bass (1990a) defined transformational leadership as an approach that is utilized to create valuable and positive

change in followers and focuses on the organizational objectives. Lambert (2002) asserted that integrated leadership is a combination of many leadership frameworks that benefit the entire school organization. It rests heavily in the concept of shared leadership throughout the school community, and transformational and instructional leadership. According to Fullan (2001b), moral leadership is grounded in universal ethics that empower others and encourage one to uphold positive characteristics to promote oneself or the organization. Principals are concerned about closing the achievement gap between high-performing and lower-performing students. They are focused on the entire school community and look for ways to positively impact their school environment.

A synopsis of instructional, transformational, integrated, and moral leadership is provided. These leadership frameworks are used more often in the literature about educational reform and the most dominant framework discussed when impacting education is instructional leadership.

Instructional Leadership

All this accountability has definitely changed the definition of instructional leadership at the school level. Principals must make high student achievement a top priority and address areas that impact student achievement. High expectations must be created and a framework for students to maximize their learning should be evident (McEwan, 2003). Instruction must be data driven, data should be analyzed often, and professional learning evident for educators. Parent outreach and a can-do-spirit embedded in schools must be a part of the planning (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007). School leaders will definitely have to be strong instructional leaders, know how to shape school culture,

implement best instructional practices, know curriculum, assessment, and instruction as well as about state and federal accountability (Greenfield, 1997). Last, but not least, schools must have a way to organize student support services, and work with families and communities to initiate systemic changes that will impact student achievement (Pechman & Fiester, 1996). The landmark NCLB legislation emphasizes the importance of scientifically and evidence based research programs and practices. School leaders must know what they are and how to best utilize them to serve their students (Cawelti, 2000).

Teachers and paraprofessionals must meet all the requirements of being highly qualified and be knowledgeable about how to teach reading, math, and science at higher levels. Annual state testing has to be developed and implemented by states. Schools have to analyze not only test data, but the teaching abilities of their teachers and remove the ineffective teachers (Popham, 2004).

In the early 1990s, principals were responsible for informing teachers about new practices, technology, and effective instructional practices. They had to critique these elements to determine their applicability to the classroom (Whitaker, 1997). Researchers agreed that principals must be good instructional leaders. Barth (1990) declared, “show me a good school and I will show you a good principal” (p. 64). When the concept of instructional leadership emerged, principals were thought to be good leaders if they led a school setting clear expectations, maintaining good discipline, and creating high standards. More research revealed that indicators for effective instructional leadership need a number of variables. Foriska (1994) discussed instructional leadership being critical to the maintenance and development of an effective school. Principals must

supply teachers with resources and incentives to help keep their focus on student achievement. Jantzi and Leithwood (1996) defined components that were critical to the practice of school leadership. They were articulating a vision, fostering group goals, providing individual support to teachers and students, challenging educators intellectually, providing a framework, and setting high expectations.

In the 1980s, when the school reform movement began, the first responsibility for school leaders was to put student learning at the center of their jobs. Today, the instructional leadership remains a dominant theme with a much more complex form (Hallinger & Heck, 2002). Now, they must immerse themselves in the core foundation of teaching and learning, use data to make instructional decisions, and align staff development with the student learning needs. Principals need sophisticated understanding of curriculum, assessment, and instruction (Anthes, 2002). Fink and Resnick (1999) reminded researchers that today's best schools are weaving learning into the very fabric of the organization and there needs to be a comprehensive approach. Principals must engage in intensive, focused examination of learning and teaching. They do this by participating in monthly conferences, attending support groups, completing peer observations, and conducting walk-throughs in order to evaluate, discuss, and create reflective analysis. Principals must engage their teachers, understand good teaching, and be good teachers in working with their staffs (Hallinger, Bickman, & Davis, 1996).

Instructional leadership models emerged in the early 1980s from early research on effective schools. This body of research identified strong, directive leadership focused on curriculum and instruction from the principals as a characteristic of schools that were

effective at teaching children in poor urban communities (Edmonds, 1979; Leithwood & Montgomery, 1982). Although not without its critics (Cuban, 1984; Miskel, 1982), this model shaped much of the thinking about effective principal leadership disseminated in the 1980s and early 1990s. Moreover, the emerging popularity of this model soon became evident from its widespread adoption as the model of choice by most principal leadership academies (Hallinger, 1992; Hallinger & Wimpelberg, 1992).

During the 1990s, scholars and practitioners popularized terms such as shared leadership, teacher leadership, distributed leadership, and transformational leadership (Barth, 1990). The emergence of these leadership models indicated a broader dissatisfaction with the instructional leadership model, which many believed focused too much on the principal as the center of expertise, power, and authority. Nonetheless, it is fortunate that over the past two decades, scholars have subjected instructional leadership (Glasman, 1984; Heck, Larsen, & Marcoulides, 1990) to extended empirical study.

Although a variety of conceptual models have been implemented over the past twenty-five years of research into educational leadership, two major approaches have sustained in the field: instructional leadership and transformational leadership. Around 1990 researchers began to shift their attention to leadership models construed as more consistent with evolving trends in educational reform such as empowerment, shared leadership, and organizational learning. This evolution of the educational leadership role has been labeled as reflecting second order changes (Leithwood, 1994) as it is aimed primarily at changing the organization's normative structure. The most frequently used

model of this variety has been transformational leadership (Bass, 1985, 1997b; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000b; Silins & Mulford, 2002).

Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership focuses on developing the organization's capacity to innovate. Rather than focusing specifically on direct coordination, control, and supervision of curriculum and instruction, it seeks to build the organization's capacity to select its purposes and support the development of changes to practices of teaching and learning. Transformational leadership is viewed as distributed in that it focuses on developing a shared vision and commitment to school change (Bycio & Allen, 1995).

The principal alone will not provide the leadership that creates these conditions. Leadership should be shared, coming from teachers as well as the principal (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000a; Louis & Marks, 1998). Second, the model starts from different motivational assumptions. Behavioral components such as individualized support, intellectual stimulation, and personal vision suggest that the model is grounded in understanding the needs of individual staff rather than coordinating and controlling them towards the organization's desired ends (Bottery, 2001). In this regards, the model seeks to influence people by building them from the bottom-up rather than from the top down.

Another distinction has evolved around the conceptual dichotomy of transformational leadership (Bycio & Allen, 1995; Howell & Avolio, 1993; Silins, 1994). This distinction contrasts leadership that focuses on management of existing relationships and maintenance of the status quo with leadership that seeks to envision and create the future by synthesizing and extending the aspirations of members of the organizational

community. Research has determined that effective leadership requires transformational actions and elements (Jahan, 1999).

The last conceptual distinction, clearly related to the first two, addresses the relationship by which leadership achieves its effects, through first-order versus second-order change in the school. In transformational leadership, one seeks to generate second-order effects. Transformational leaders increase the capacity of others in the school to produce first-order effects on learning (Lambert, 1998; Leithwood & Louis, 1999). For example, transformational leaders create the conditions in which teachers engage in continuous learning and in which they routinely share their learning with others. These leaders work with others in the school community to identify personal goals and then link these to the broader organizational goals (Barth, 1990; Lambert, 2002). This approach is believed to increase commitment of the staff that sees the connection between what they are trying to accomplish and the mission of the school. These changes are conceived as second-order effects in the sense that the principal is creating the conditions under which others are committed and self-motivated to work towards the improvement of the school without specific direction (Kirby, Paradise, & King, 1992).

Leithwood (1994) also found that principal effects are achieved through fostering group goals modeling desired behavior for others, providing intellectual stimulation, and individualized support towards personal and staff development. In these schools, principals were better at supporting staff, providing recognition, knowing problems of school, were more approachable, follow through, seek new ideas, and spent considerable time developing human resources.

What has emerged is a set of understandings about a more dispersed leadership model which is opportunistic, flexible, responsive, and context-specific, rather than prescribed by roles, inflexible, hierarchical and status-driven (Johnson & Haoldaway, 1990). It is a model that encourages and provides support for a broadly based leadership approach. In schools where sustained school improvement has been maintained, fundamental assumptions to which collaborative inquiry gives rise, a new paradigm of leadership seems to have emerged (Lambert, 2002).

Three conclusions about leadership from these actively improving school contexts are prevalent. They are that school leaders have to develop and expand their leadership capacity, the school improvement journey offers a context for the development of new understandings, both about leadership and about school development, and the collaborative processes inherent to the inquiry approach to school improvement offer the opportunity for teachers to study, to learn about, to share, and to enact leadership.

Jackson (2000) noted that as leadership becomes more diffused within the school, uncertainty may increase rather than decrease. This is a result of more ‘voices’ (administrators, teachers, parents, staff, students) engaging in the process of providing leadership for school improvement. As Jackson (2000) suggested, transformational leadership requires a higher tolerance for ambiguity and uncertainty from the principal and an ability to live with the messy process of change.

One of the major impediments to effective school leadership is trying to carry the burden alone. When a principal takes on the challenges of going beyond the basic demands of the job (i.e., the transactional tasks of making the school run), the burden

becomes even heavier (Barth, 1980; Cuban, 1988). Influential scholars have questioned whether it is realistic to expect any significant number of principals to meet this challenge. Lambert (2002) contended that the days of the lone instructional or transformational leader are over. We no longer believe that one administrator can serve as the instructional leader for the entire school without the substantial participation of other educators.

Strong transformational leadership by the principal is essential in supporting the commitment of teachers. Because teachers themselves can be barriers to the development of teacher leadership, transformational principals are needed to invite teachers to share leadership functions. When teachers perceive principals' instructional leadership behaviors to be appropriate, they grow in commitment, professional involvement, and willingness to innovate (Sheppard, 1996). Thus, instructional leadership can itself be transformational.

When addressing transformational leadership in the public school settings and the effective strategies in helping others to transform, questions to ponder are: (a) what are the characteristic of transformative leaders, (b) how do we first and foremost transform ourselves as leaders to become agents of systemic change, and (c) how do we create the framework in assisting others to transform within schools?

According to research, leaders must possess certain qualities. These qualities focus on the individuals' vision and commitment, and they must demonstrate a strong level of belief in equality, equity, empowerment, sustainability, collaboration, shared power, responsibility, participatory involvement, responsiveness, accountability, non-

corruptiveness, and consensus-oriented leadership. The sense of power must be used as an instrument of liberation, inclusion, and equality and not to dominate or exclude.

A transformational leader must include members of the community in order for change to be effective and efficient. During the early stages of planning change, it would be a good idea to hold open forums where community members can ask questions or express concerns. This will allow the leader the opportunity to prepare a game plan of how to address these issues before laying the plan out for the community to vote on it.

A transformational leader should organize groups that show how diversity actually empowers a community and not weaken it. In doing so, they can help the culturally insensitive person become more appreciative of other peoples way of life. Therefore, one can reduce some of the conflict that is caused when a community's demographics begin to change (Bottery, 2001).

The basic ideas behind the ideal of transformational leadership involve collaborative efforts and empowering the entire school community (Liontos, 1997). A transformational leader will look at the constituencies that are being served and might in theory form them into a triangular shape. The idea that has become known as the stakeholder theory came from the transformational leadership vocabulary (Cashin, 2000). Who are the stakeholders in the school is the critical question? What educators have now realized is that schools should be serving not only student but parents and the community as well. To foster real growth is to support the area as a whole. To do these positive relations at all angles must be built up and built out. The truly transformational leader

seeks the greatest good for the largest number and is concerned about doing what is right, hones and wants to set a tone of mutual trust (Bass, 1997a).

Haberman (1999a) shared that the first response is by seeing that good sound instruction is the foundation of the school day. An important key is to listen to students and treat them respectfully. Another key is to continue to develop shared criteria to guide short and long term decision-making and goals. Social justice and academic excellence can go hand in hand. Transformation correlates to leaders who have commitments that are grounded in substance and rooted in morals.

The leadership of engagement and transformation is based upon imagination, reflection, serving as a catalyst, and valuing perspectives. At the core of great leaders is inner guidance. The journey from the valley to the mountaintop of becoming a transformative leader is the longest one of all but ultimately it is the most rewarding. It is not an idle pursuit. Leaders do not do great things by dwelling on their limitations, but by focusing on their possibilities. They leave the past behind them and turn toward the future. Every decision they make, will influence leadership and learning. What they do and how they do it matters! Leaders must be able to develop the people they lead and transform the organization they serve.

Integrated Leadership

According to integrated leadership, both transformational and instructional, are most effective for improving school performance. Principals who share leadership responsibilities with others are less subject to burnout than principal 'heroes' who attempt the challenges and complexities of leadership alone. When the principal elicits high

levels of commitment and professionalism from teachers and works interactively with teachers in a shared instructional leadership capacity, schools have the benefit of integrated leadership; they are organizations that learn and perform at high levels (Sheppard, 1996).

No single style of management seems appropriate for all schools. Principals must find the style and structures most suited to their own local situation. Bossert, Dwyer & Lee, (1982) suggested that certain principal behaviors have different effects in different organizational settings. It appears that schools that are in greater need do respond to the type of directive leadership encompassed in the traditional instructional leadership model. These turn around schools need an urgent stimulus to convert a climate of low expectations into one of success. Moreover, when schools are failing to provide adequate education, there is often a perceived need to produce quick results. Strong instructional leadership is a leadership approach that seems to meet these needs. At the same time, as Jackson (2000) and Fullan (2002) observed, school improvement is a journey.

Furthermore, in the review of the literature on principal effects in dealing with the challenges, Hallinger and Heck (1996b) concluded that it is virtually meaningless to study principal leadership without reference to the school context. The context of the school is a source of constraints, resources, and opportunities that the principal must understand and address in order to lead. Contextual variables of interest to principals include the student background, community type, organizational structure, school culture, teacher experience and competence, fiscal resources, school size, and bureaucratic and labor organization (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1999a).

Leadership must be conceptualized as a mutual influence process rather than as a one-way process in which leaders influence others (Leithwood, 1994). Effective leaders respond to the changing needs of their context. Indeed, in a very real sense the leader's behaviors are shaped by the school context. The most important and the most difficult job of a school principal is to change the prevailing culture of a school (Leithwood, 1992). The school's culture dictates, in no uncertain terms, 'the way we do things around here.' A school's culture has far more influence on life and learning in the schoolhouse than the president of the country, the state department of education, the superintendent, the school board, or even the principal, teachers, and parents can ever have. One cannot, of course, change a school culture alone. But one can provide forms of leadership that invite others to join as observers of the old and architects of the new. Sustained improvement and long-term improvements will ultimately depend upon the staff assuming increasing levels of ownership over proposed changes in the school.

Drawing upon the framework by analyzing both the instructional and transformational models is critical. Researching to see if these concepts are utilized and embedded to bring about the best results in educating the students is paramount. Do current school principals focus on creating a shared sense of purpose in their school? Questions to find out if they develop a climate of high expectations, implement a school culture that embraces diversity, focus on the improvement of teaching and learning, shape the reward structure of the school to reflect the goals set for staff and students, organize and provide a wide range of activities aimed at intellectual stimulation and development

for staff and if they are truly visible in their schools are all important to leading in this era of high accountability.

Today's school environment is characterized by high-stakes testing. High-stakes testing refers generally to any assessment used for accountability that has significant consequences. Applied to school improvement, high-stakes testing has consequences for students, their schools, their districts, their teachers, and their principals (Good, 2008). Therefore, practices must be analyzed, plans developed, and the most effective framework implemented.

Moral Leadership

Another critical facet of creating a positive environment is to foster a culture of trust (Sergiovanni, 1992). Great leaders insist on having the right people in the right positions, so once that is accomplished, great leaders must have faith in the people they lead. Successful administrators have trusting relationships with their employees. In order for a staff member to be their personal best, they must be able to trust their leader to wholeheartedly support their efforts, and they must know their leaders trust them to act as professionals (Stoll & Fink, 1996). Moral leaders strive to encourage autonomy and have faith in the expertise of every staff member. Teachers want to be valued, and they want to be trusted. The greatest school leaders never lose sight of how they wanted to be treated as a teacher, and they let those memories guide them in making decisions. According to Southworth (2002), creating a positive school culture rests on the tone set by the principal.

In the book *What Great Principals Do Differently*, Todd Whitaker (2003) discusses how principals set the tones for their schools. Whitaker (2003) states, “When the principal sneezes, the whole school catches a cold” (p. 30). The principal is the leader and everything the leader says and does affects the tone of the school. With this in mind, a moral leader must filter out the negatives and share a positive attitude with all staff and students.

Moral leaders aim to empower others and encourage them to become active stakeholders. Innovative leaders strive to awaken the leader in others (Beare, Caldwell, & Millikan, 1992). The most successful schools have administrators that encourage their teachers to become leaders and are not threatened by feedback and critical input. Empowering their staff takes courage. In *Good to Great*, Collins (2001) referred to the idea as the window and the mirror. He believes that:

Level 5 leaders look out the window to apportion credit to factors outside themselves when things go well (and if they cannot find a specific person or event to give credit to, they credit good luck). At the same time, they look in the mirror to apportion responsibility, never blaming bad luck when things go poorly. (p. 35)

Being a leader that practices this philosophy takes courage and selflessness. Moral leaders have the strength to admit their faults and the courage to let others shine. The leaders know the success of the school rests on the strength of the team (Bolman & Deal, 1984).

These leaders work to enhance equity, social justice, and the quality of life; to expand access and opportunity; to encourage respect for difference and diversity; to

strengthen democracy, civic life, and civic responsibility, and to promote cultural enrichment, creative expression, intellectual honesty, the advancement of knowledge, and personal freedom coupled with social responsibility (Bolam, McMahon, Pocklington, & Weindling, 1993). Leaders must have a solid foundation in the principle of social justice. The leaders also need to demonstrate a commitment to human rights and peace. According to (Beare et al., 1992) both principles should be envisioned in a holistic manner.

Moral educational leaders are grounded in a universal ethics that schools must be one of equitable access for all children where diversity is celebrated rather than merely accommodated (Sergiovanni, 1992). This type of leadership stresses not only the academic, but social growth of children as well. These leaders must be a political and moral act of courage that works to empower followers to become leaders.

School leaders must have the moral courage and grapple with the administrative structure and the social and political culture (Bass, 1997a). Leaders should have the moral courage to embrace the unrighteous, immoral organizational behaviors in school. It enables a leader to critically engage the present, propose an agenda for transformation, and envision a better future. They ask the penetrating questions in the learning community which are designed to demystify embedded conditions and rituals (Bottery, 2001).

Educational leaders have to consider themselves stewards of a community because of being a change agent. They interact with all stakeholders and navigate the

educational pipeline. Leaders possess a clear picture of the vision and promote the community's blueprint for change (Cuban, 1988).

The first step in creating an environment in which this type of change can take place is for a leader to have a vision and have a strong sense of their commitments (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007). Although everyone will not necessarily buy into the vision, a good leader still takes their vision to them. This offers the opportunity to teach the critics why the vision is in the best interest of the community as a whole. A moral leader will also use the concerns expressed by the critics as a chance to strengthen the vision's major points.

Leaders must empower their followers by helping them to re-learn and re-think the way they do things (Dimmock & Walker, 2000). A leader should organize groups that show how diversity actually empowers a community and not weaken it. In doing so, they help the culturally insensitive person become more appreciative of other peoples way of life. Therefore, they can reduce some of the conflict that is caused when a community's demographics begin to change (Hallinger, 2003b).

The truly moral leaders seek the greatest good for the largest number and are concerned about doing what is right; they want to hone and set a tone of mutual trust (Bass, 1997a). A committed leader will employ their professional and personal network to support the goal and mission of their schools as well (Hargreaves & Fink, 2004).

To create this kind of relationship educational leaders must take the responsibility to develop a relationship with everyone they encounter. It is not enough to accept the norm and the practice of that norm; continual communication is a must and a key

(Hallinger, 2003b). It is not enough to assume that everyone accepts what has been created as the norms. To provide education to all, communication must be for all.

Many believe that the actions need to take place where it reaches the students. Students should be considered the major stakeholders in the school; it is the students who will gain or lose the most by the school's performance (Hargreaves & Fink, 2004).

What are the keys for a leader to reach out to the students? The first response is by seeing that good sound instruction is the foundation of the school day (Haberman, 1999a). Social justice and academic excellence can go hand in hand. What must be done is to establish equality of excellence for all and not just for certain groups? Democratic values and actions must be highlighted communicated and reinforced each day in every way possible. Consensus building is the norm and leaders empower others to assist in the decision making process (Heck, 1993).

Leaders can begin their collaborative journey by assembling a staff of innovative, passionate people who share in the desire to do what is best for children at all costs. Leaders know that having the right people on board is paramount. A great school is built on the foundation of a mission to serve children and prepare them for a successful life in a changing world. In order to give students the tools they need to live productive lives, schools must have remarkable teachers. This can be accomplished in two ways: hiring the best teachers and awakening the greatness within the teachers you already have (Leithwood, 1992). That is why it is imperative to be able to awaken the greatness within the people you have by fostering an environment where teachers can reach their personal best and give their best each day (Leithwood, 1994).

In *Good to Great*, author Jim Collins uses a bus metaphor to describe the importance of assembling a staff. Collins (2001) insists that great leaders view their organizational plan like that of a journey. They do not decide where to drive their bus and then go out and find people to ride. Instead, great leaders find the right people to make the journey with them and they make sure they put those people in the right seats on the bus. That may also involve getting the wrong people off the bus to make room for great people. Once the right people are in the right seats, then it is time to decide where to take the bus, and together, the team can plan the route. The right people are an organization's greatest asset and for leaders who are committed to finding the best people to accompany them on their journey (Dimmock & Walker, 2000). Moral leaders search for those teachers that believe in the power of education for children. The moral leader will be committed to finding people that share in a passion for teaching and learning and who are willing to take the journey with them, no matter how treacherous the roads (Stoll & Fink, 1996).

Positive school culture is created by encouraging teachers to work together and share successes and hardships. An effective school leader must foster collaboration among teachers and create opportunities for teamwork (Edmonds, 1979).

In order to achieve this oneness, moral leaders must first be able to be honest with themselves, create a sense of purpose for their own lives, and design a plan to move forward in the journey of being a more integrative practitioner in this rapidly changing profession (Southworth, 2002). In doing so, they will learn to integrate their intellectual

abilities, their practical applications, and their personal interests in order to better serve the ones they lead.

One must be able to utilize the talents and skills of all in a learning community in order to make the environment inclusive of all stakeholders. Within this framework, one must have the common understanding that all can contribute no matter how big or how small. The unity comes from the creation within the community. One must be willing to allow others to take chances and allow for failure before success. Leaders must be given the opportunity to be creative innovators in this high stakes of accountability (Bolam et al., 1993).

Summary and Significance to School Leaders

Throughout the review of current literature related to school principals' perception of accountability and leading, one consistent gap exists. That is the gap of elementary principals' perspective. More information is needed from elementary school principals about how they perceive accountability, how it affects their role, and what leadership framework they operate from to create success within their schools. This will assist other school principals with gaining more knowledge about how to lead effectively and possibly avoid leadership pitfalls. This research will empower school principals and their perspectives will be captured.

School principals are critical in the educational process and need to share their viewpoints (Bonstingl, 2001). Therefore, the need of a qualitative study such as this to ascertain perceptions of elementary school principals is urgently important. Elementary school principals need to be heard and listened to. Their viewpoints are just as important

as data collected by quantitative measures related to accountability. We must take their perspectives into consideration and share the learned knowledge about leading successfully. That knowledge can assist other school leaders and those involved in the educational process.

This is significant to school leaders so that they can operate from a framework that creates success within their schools in regards to their leadership abilities. The school principal is the school based leader of the educational system which provides the framework for a community (Hallinger, 2003a). School principals are held accountable for the adequate yearly progress of their schools (Sclafani, 2002). If one understands the perceptions, they can better deal with the reality, and do and think differently if changes are needed to improve the outcome. School principals are pivotal to the success of educational accountability in schools (Huber, 2003).

School principals are expected to achieve no matter what type of school or student they lead in. Little consideration is given to challenges principals face and what needs to be done to address principal's specific concerns. This study will address some of those issues. It is not enough to simply gauge the perceptions and needs of school principals but it must be taken into account the ways in which principals are impacted so that current and future school principals can be better equipped to operate with the intent of succeeding in this era of high stakes testing. This is the broader context that schools and principals must understand.

If school principals are to have hope for a brighter future in their new role, school leaders must work to understand how those past and current perceptions are impacting

their ability to lead effectively. For this to happen, school leaders must reflect and learn from school principals that are currently serving. Then they must work in conjunction with those involved to address their needs. Principals presently serving in schools can gain invaluable insights into the demands to benefit all students and subgroups of students with meaningful high standards. Principals succeed when armed with knowledge and the ability to use that knowledge to overcome obstacles (Bonstingl, 2001).

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction and Research Questions

Qualitative research reaches into the depths of individuals' perceptions and taps into opinions to begin unraveling viewpoints about accountability and leading schools in this study. Qualitative research gives understanding about a subject's perception of an issue.

The focus of this study was gaining an understanding about principals' perceptions of accountability and leading schools in this era of high stakes testing. As indicated earlier, more research is needed about school principal's perceptions, how accountability has affected their roles, what leadership framework principals believe are necessary for accountability success, and how principals manage their perceptions more. For this reason, I developed an interview-based approach that shed insights about their perspectives. Glesne (2006) describes qualitative research as a practice that seeks "to interpret people's constructions of reality and identify patterns in their perspectives and behaviors" (p. 9). The main goal was to allow them to share their viewpoints. Therefore, I was able to address the following research questions:

1. What are the perceptions of elementary principals towards accountability?
2. How has accountability affected the leadership role of a school principal?

3. What leadership framework do school principals most often perceive is necessary for accountability success?
4. How do leaders manage their perceptions in this age of high stakes accountability to create success?

These questions were designed to seek more information on elementary principals' perceptions of accountability. The current research focuses more on other topics related to school leadership but not necessarily perceptions of accountability as it relates to NCLB. Therefore, I looked for any prevalent themes, trends, commonalities, and differences in their perceptions about accountability, how it has affected their role, and their perceptions about what leadership framework they perceive are necessary for success. It was my intention for participants to respond to an array of questions that were all connected to accountability and that were relevant to the leadership role of school principals today. This empowered them with more knowledge and an opportunity to learn from other school principals.

Research Design

Many perspectives influenced the methodology of this particular study. Creswell (2001) states, "qualitative research begins with assumptions, a worldview, the possible use of a theoretical lens, and the study of research problems inquiring into the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem" (p. 37). I interviewed principals to gain access to the various perspectives. Rapport was an issue taken seriously. According to Creswell (2001), no matter how qualitative researchers view their roles, they develop relationships with research participants. It would be inappropriate to

cross the line between rapport and friendship discussed by Glesne (2006). However, there was a level of rapport that I worked hard to monitor and maintain between the participants in this study and myself. This was particularly important for principals who may not have experienced success in their role as school principal as it relates to accountability and who may perceive me as a resource within the school system.

My intent was to identify various perceptions of school principals as well as look for themes and patterns based on the research questions and focus. Interviews were used as the primary method of data collection, along with ascertaining demographic information about each participant. I had the opportunity to examine responses and look for similarities and differences of perceptions, and closely analyzed all the responses collected from participants.

I employed the following methods to gather data: interviews, demographic questionnaires, and follow-up interviews as needed. Each method provided a multitude of viewpoints to the overall study of perceptions of elementary school principals about accountability and leading. Based on this, I was able to gain richer data. Each participant and source enabled me to better understand the perspectives from different lenses, thereby causing me to self-check against subjectivity.

Study Participants

I conducted interviews with participants from two different categories: principals in highly impacted or equity plus elementary schools and principals in non-highly impacted or non-equity plus elementary schools. Again, equity plus schools are schools

designated as having at least seventy-five percentage of the student population on free and reduced lunch as determined by the county officials in which I conducted my research. Non-equity plus schools have a very small student population receiving free and reduced lunch.

Principals provided insights into the many perceptions about accountability. It was beneficial to gain more perspectives, draw meaningful conclusions, probe deeply into their practice, and allow them to share their thoughts.

Both groups had a wide range of years of experience as educators, school leaders, and elementary school principals. The groups were mixed gender and had experience ranging from three years to over twenty years as school principal. The participants were selected based on the fact that they currently served as school principals in a school district that serves over 52,000 students and the school principals represent a variety of years in the field of education. These groups of participants were important to the study because they provided insights into their perceptions based on the experience and the type of school they served. According to Patton (2002), information from rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research.

Initially, participants were provided with general research information about the study, later sent an email with more specific details, and then given an opportunity to participate. Once the information was review by each potential study participants, they confirmed their participation and the process of setting up interviews began.

Both groups shared their perceptions of accountability as it relates to high stakes testing. They responded to questions that school principals are often encountered with about testing, student performance, accountability for students and educators, monetary rewards, sanctions, the purpose of testing, their leadership abilities, and being an instructional leader. The second section focused on how accountability had impacted them with a focal point on self-accountability, leadership skills, growth and development, and social, emotional, and physical well-being. The third section targeted school principal's perceptions about how and what leadership frameworks had impacted their ability to be successful. Instructional, integrated, transformational, and moral leadership frameworks were used for this study.

All participants of both interview groups possessed an understanding of accountability, NCLB, state mandates, and components of local, state, and federal requirements about accountability. They also had to complete a demographic survey in which information about their experience level, age, gender, educational level, ethnicity, years of experience in education, years of experience as a school principal, and other information about their school were ascertained. I believed in involving participants who were currently in different schools in order to provide a richer source of data about the various perceptions of accountability and leading.

This study did not include the school in which I am serving as principal. This allowed assurance that I have no biases that would result from perceived coercion to participate on the part of the participants. Characteristics of the participants are provided in Table 1.

Table 1

Participant Demographic Information

Participant	Gender	Age	Ethnicity	Educational Level	Years of Experience in Education	Years of Experience As Principal	Years at School
Daryl	Male	51-60	African American	Masters	26+	6-10	1-5
Susie	Female	61-70	African American	Ed.S.	26+	11-15	6-10
Fred	Male	51-60	White	Masters	21-25	1-5	1-5
Pat	Female	51-60	African American	Masters	26+	11-15	11-15
Babs	Female	51-60	White	Masters	21-25	11-15	1-5
Darrel	Female	41-50	African American	Ed.D	16-20	6-10	1-5
Runner	Male	41-50	White	Ed.D	21-25	6-10	1-5
Joyce	Female	51-60	African American	Masters	26+	11-15	1-5
Taylor	Female	51-60	White	Masters	26+	21-25	1-5
Mildred	Female	51-60	African American	Masters	26+	11-15	1-5

The participants' characteristics ranged widely in every category. This study was designed to include five Equity Plus principals and five Non-Equity Plus principals. Two male and three female principals were in the Equity Plus group and four males and one female in the Non-Equity Plus group. Seven were fifty-one to sixty years of age, two were 41-50, one was 61-70, six African American, four White, and three of the principals had advanced degrees and seven had Masters Degrees. Six of the principals had twenty-six years of experience in the field of education and three with under twenty-six years of experience. In terms of experience as school principals, three had six to ten years, five had eleven to fifteen years, one had one to five years, and only one with over twenty-one years of experience. When asked to provide information about the years of experience at the particular school they currently serve, eight had one to five years, one with six to ten years, and one with eleven to fifteen years at their school.

The schools' demographic information revealed that two of the principals lead magnet school, schools with special themes, and five of the schools were designated as Title One. All of the Title One schools had a large percentage of minority students and most did not meet adequate yearly progress. Only one Equity Plus school made less than expected growth, one Non-Equity Plus school made less than expected growth and one with no recognition. The other schools made expected or high growth as it related to state accountability. Lastly, only one Equity Plus school had sanctions imposed and one designated as a School Improvement Grant School in which they received a significant amount of money from the federal government to improve student performance. See Table 2 for Participant School Information.

Table 2

Participant School Information

Participant	Equity Plus Status	Magnet School	Title1	Demographics of School	AYP Status	ABC Status	Sanctions Imposed
Daryl	Equity Plus	No	Yes	2% White 59% AA 25% Hispanic 15% Other	Not Met	Expected Growth	No
Susie	Equity Plus	No	Yes	33% White 33% AA 34% Hispanic	Not Met	Less Than Expected	Yes
Fred	Equity Plus	No	Yes	12% White 27% Asian 42% AA 35% Hispanic 8% Other	Not Met	High Growth	No
Pat	Not Equity Plus	No	No	67% White 14% AA 8% Hispanic 5% Asian 5% Other	Yes	High Growth	No
Babs	Not Equity Plus	No	No	95% White 3% AA 1% Asian	Yes	High Growth	No
Darrel	Equity Plus	Yes	Yes	95% AA 5% Hispanic	No	Expected Growth	No
Runner	Not Equity Plus	No	No	59% White 30% AA 9% Hispanic 2% Other	No	Less than Expected	No
Joyce	Not Equity Plus	Yes	No	42% White 53% AA 3% Hispanic	Yes	High Growth	No

Table 2 (cont.)

Participant	Equity Plus Status	Magnet School	Title1	Demographics of School	AYP Status	ABC Status	Sanctions Imposed
Taylor	Not Equity Plus	No	No	67% White 21% Black 7% Hispanic 4% Other	No	No Recognition	No
Mildred	Equity Plus	No	Yes	75% AA 22% Hispanic 3% Other	No	Expected Growth	No SIG School

Data Collection Techniques

Interviews

The goal of the interviews was to allow more participants to share their perceptions and experience. The format gave me an opportunity to obtain their perceptions about accountability and leading in an open ended way. Interviews had several advantages, such as gathering more data about a particular topic and the participants sharing information. This allowed for quality of data. Interviews also tend to be enjoyable to participants because they give voice to those who may have never been invited to provide input in the past (Krueger & Casey, 2000; Patton, 2002). Interviews can also provide an opportunity for the researcher to explore the topic and determine a line of questions for follow up interviews (Glesne, 2006). Each interview ranged from forty-five minutes to almost two hours in duration.

I used a format that allowed me to gain a depth of data. The interviews consisted of two main parts. One part was used to acquire information about the participants and

the second part allowed the participants to respond to questions. Participants were asked to respond to a series of open-ended questions and the interviews took place in a location chosen by the each of the participants. An interview can be used to collect data about their feelings, thoughts, and experiences.

The interview protocol contained key questions for participants to expound on each question in order for them to share their perspectives. The outcome data of this study is reported including their perceptions, experiences, and any other pertinent information shared. Overall, the goal was that the representation of their perceptions will be empowering to them and meaningful to the field of education. According to Glesne (2006), qualitative research methods allow subjects the opportunity to share their perceptions while yielding a deeper understanding of issues.

Demographic Questionnaire

Participants responded to a brief demographic questionnaire. This instrument was used to gather important information including age, gender, ethnicity, educational level, years of experience as a principal, years of experience in education, years of experience at their particular school, the type of school, student population demographics, and current status of test data as it relates to AYP and ABCs. This instrument enabled me to have background knowledge about the participants. I looked for patterns and themes to emerge among those who have similar and or different backgrounds. It is important to remember that gaining information about participants will lead to a greater understanding of perceptions, attitudes, and processes (Glesne, 2006).

Document Analysis

Although interviews were my primary method of data collection, some participants did share actual test data information, which is available from public sources, with me about their school. This was not required as a component of gathering data, but it helped to better explain their experience or perceptions. This included any test data, student demographical information, and other similar documents related to accountability. This was especially important if they felt it helped convey their thoughts. Participants may feel more comfortable with providing actual documentation about their perceptions or school success.

Data Collection, Management, and Analysis

There was a coherent plan for data collection and management from the outset of this study and the following process was used to collect, manage and analyze the data.

Data Collection and Management

A demographic questionnaire, interviews, and an analysis of any presented artifacts from participants relevant to the school principals' experience were used to collect data in this study. As data was collected, I looked for common themes or patterns to emerge from among the data sources.

All interviews were recorded digitally and transcribed verbatim. This ensured that everything stated in these sessions is preserved for reliability purposes (Merriam, 1998; Patton, 2002). In addition, I took detailed notes during the interviews to assist with data collection regarding non-verbal communication not captured by audio recording devices.

This will served as an additional component of quality control to ensure the data collected is extensive and reliable (Patton, 2002).

Using a semi-structured interview approach with participants enabled me to collect pre-determined categories of data while also providing me the flexibility to access a greater depth of information as opportunities arise (Patton, 2002). The follow up questions that I posed enable me to gain further clarification while also providing deeper insights and a better understanding of the participants' responses (Merriam, 1998).

Data Analysis

After collecting the data, I began the analysis process. Gathering, organizing, and analyzing data is an on-going process throughout the research study with an end goal of reducing the data “into compelling, authentic, and meaningful statement” (Janesick, 2000, p. 388). Six steps have been identified for data analysis and presentation. The six steps are: (a) organizing and preparing the data for analyzing, (b) reading the data and getting a feel for an understanding, (c) categorizing the data, (d) identifying themes, pervasive perceptions, categories of topics, (e) placing the data into the appropriate category, and (f) interpreting the findings and deciding how to report them (Janesick, 2000). The data were read several times in order to gain further acquaintance with the responses of the participants.

I used a qualitative approach to data collection, which will enable me to search for patterns and meaning. After the interviews were completed, I coded the transcriptions, documents offered by participants as well as their questionnaires according to the category of information sought. Coding is a process of sorting and defining data that are

meaningful to the research topic. Glesne (2006) states, “by putting similar pieces together an organizational framework is created” (p. 9). I focused on identifying common perspectives, ideas, themes, and patterns of information that emerge from each source of data. While reading the transcripts, questionnaire, and any documents provided by the participants, I looked for specific key words or ideas and coded them to help identify those emerging themes and make notes as needed. The process of coding provides further familiarity with the data and generates meaning.

Academic, Professional, and Personal Perspectives

It was important for me to disclose my positionality from the onset of this study due to the fact that I serve as an elementary school principal in the same district as the participants. Qualitative researchers have an obligation to disclose their theoretical postures at all stages of the research process (Janesick, 2000). As mentioned earlier, the following is an explanation of my experiences and perspectives relative to the current study.

In my current position as the principal of a school where challenges are a reality in regards to NCLB and accountability, I have been fortunate to have experienced some academic success within my school. This propelled me to want to learn more about perceptions of other school principals and learn more about how to best create an environment that breeds success not only within my school, but other schools and share learned knowledge with other school principals. Therefore, I disclosed this important perspective with my participants. The benefits of what I learned far outweigh the risk of me being too closely associated and self-monitoring was utilized throughout the process.

Rapport certainly was a consideration that I took seriously considering how closely connected I am to the research participants. Some were colleagues with whom I connected with easily and others were colleagues just by the nature of being a school principal. In my role as researcher, it would be inappropriate to merge my relationship (Glesne, 2006). There was a level of rapport that I have worked hard to establish between participants and myself. This rapport centers on care, trustworthiness, and concern for the participants well-being. This was important to the extent that participants are comfortable opening up to me and sharing about their perceptions and their willingness to participate makes it easier for the data collection process. I monitored my role as researcher between that of the participants being researched with care.

Subjectivity

According to Peshkin (1988), one's subjectivity is like a garment that cannot be removed. Conducting research in one's own organization is filled with potential. This potential had positive aspects. Avoiding this bias was critical to conducting a quality study. Therefore, the researcher's subjectivity must be acknowledged and accounted for in a way to minimize effect. Glesne (2006) states, "subjectivity, once recognized, can be monitored for more trustworthy research and subjectivity, in itself, and can contribute to research" (p. 119). It is through on-going self-examination that I was able to use my subjectivity to my advantage rather than a hindrance. By performing self-checks throughout my data analysis, my passion for this particular study, and the principals involved served as a driving force rather than impeding my judgment. I captured my experience in a personal research journal and read it periodically to ensure my

subjectivity was not influencing my research. I sought advice from my dissertation committee and other graduate students in the field to discuss research progress. Their feedback provided an additional shield against becoming too biased. Glesne (2006) also warns against narrowing our topic and making it so personal in nature that it becomes of little interest to others, “you must be able to distinguish between your passion to understand some phenomenon and your over involvement in very personal issues that need resolution” (p. 23).

I approached this task from the perspective of a critical researcher. While I want to see transformation, I did bear in mind that I did not have all the knowledge. In fact, I have limited knowledge about the perceptions other school principals have about accountability and leading. Therefore, I have learned from the participants in the study. Hytten (2004) states, “this means that critical researchers need to give up the implicit assumption that they know how the world works and power operates, and the researched don’t” (p. 96). Glesne (2006) states, “human beings construct their perceptions of the world, that no one perception is ‘right’ or more ‘real’ than another, and that these realities must be seen as wholes rather than divided into discrete variables that are analyzed separately” (p. 7).

Reflexivity in My Research

Glesne (2006) defines reflexivity as being “as concerned with the research process as you are with the data you are obtaining” (p. 8). Therefore, reflexivity became an important part of my research process. I asked questions of myself all along the way as I wrote up the data and continuously gauge the impact that subjectivity had on the data I

gathered, the relationship with the participants, and the methods I utilized. Each transcript I read affected me in some regards as my role as a school principal.

Researchers should work to have trustworthiness in their research ventures. Qualitative researchers are heavily given the responsibility of proving their methods and credibility of findings. Researchers should focus on credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability. All of which assisted me in yielding an effective study.

Validity of Research Findings

According to Creswell (2001), qualitative researchers strive for understanding. In addition, researchers must create measures for personal perspectives not to distort data collection and analysis. I implemented a members' check and gave each participant the opportunity to review interview transcripts, verify that the data collected was consistent with their thoughts, feelings, and ideas (Glesne, 2006). In addition, I asked participants to reflect on transcripts and submit feedback to clarify meaning if necessary. This helped me to ensure I reported their perspectives accurately, and it provided deeper insight into their responses.

I also kept all transcriptions of interviews and demographic questions in a locked file in the event that my primary data sources were to be questioned. Copies of the same with my coding analysis is kept on file should the reasonableness of my analysis and conclusions be called into question.

I employed the following strategies to ensure validity:

- researcher's biases/subjectivity—disclosed the researcher's experiences, assumptions and biases at the beginning of the study (Creswell, 2001).
- member checked—asked participants to review data to ensure the perspectives reported are accurate reflections of participant viewpoints.
- Self-checked and self-monitored—to address subjectivity throughout the data collecting, coding, and analyzing process.
- used open-ended questions to ascertain more of the participants' thoughts and feelings.
- allowed participants to address any follow-up questions or concerns to me via email or in a follow up interview.
- used catalytic validation so that perceptions can be gathered to transform reality.
- used ethical validation in order to question the researcher's moral assumptions, their political and ethical implications, and equitable treatment of diverse voices (Creswell, 2001).

Benefits and Risks of the Study

A potential benefit of participating in this study was that participants had a chance to share their perceptions about accountability and leading in this era of high stakes testing. This served to empower the school principals who participated. Also, the participants input was written about and will be shared with school leaders so they might

better understand perceptions, the implications of accountability on school principals, and give other school principals ideas about leading more effectively.

To protect anonymity and confidentiality during this study and throughout the data collecting process I used pseudonyms for all participants. I also changed the locations, proper names, and any identifying details of participants. All of the interviews were audio-recorded with the permission of the participants and transcribed. All recordings were deleted from hard drives after transcription. All transcriptions will continue to be kept in a locked file cabinet. Any notes I made on electronic devices will always be password protected to ensure I am the only one with access.

Participants were free to refuse to participate and free to withdraw consent at any time during the process. There was no penalty or unfair treatment if someone decided not to participate or decided to drop out of this study. All participants continued to be a part of the study. Electronic consent forms were written in English so that all participants are able to understand the contents of each form.

This project was significant because it gave voice to elementary school principals about their own perceptions of accountability and leading. There is still a small amount of research about elementary principals' perceptions and vast research about general perceptions of accountability.

The main purpose of this research is to add to the knowledge base in the field of education, more specifically how school principals can better lead in this age of high stakes testing. The particular audience for this study includes educators, school principals, and school and district leaders. This study was designed to examine the

perceptions about accountability, how accountability has affected the role of school principals, and the framework elementary school principals deem necessary for school success. Participants provided insight based on their experiences. I believe that this will contribute to the literature regarding elementary school principals' perceptions and provide principals with strategies that will empower them to lead effectively.

Limitations of the Study

There are many elementary school principals throughout the country. Many have successfully transitioned to their new positions, others have not. This study used a small sample population of current elementary school principals who are currently serving in order to ascertain their viewpoints. The participants all reside in southeastern North Carolina. The results from this study will not be overly generalized. However, patterns and themes of principal's perceptions were identified. Further limitations in this study may include:

1. Participants selected for this study have to either serve in an Equity Plus or highly impacted school or a Non-Equity Plus or non-highly impacted school. This actually encompassed principals with a wide array of experience in a particular school district.
2. The possible conflict of my role as the principal of a school in the same district as the research is being done did not hinder principals from sharing authentically. I emphasized that all information that was shared was confidential and that participants' identity was protected. In addition, I

continually reflected on my biases through critiquing my thoughts. However, this may have caused some principals to guard their answers.

Summary

This study examined the perceptions of elementary school principals' perception of accountability by looking closely at their viewpoints and perspectives, how accountability affects their role, and what leadership frameworks do they perceive as effective in leading in this era of high stakes testing. With a focus on interviews, the researcher gave a voice to current school principals through the sharing of their experience. This is valuable to educators because the current literature seldom examines the perspectives of elementary principals. Although research has listed what school principals are doing in the area of leading, this study provided school principals with a perspective from the elementary level and how principals can lead successfully and possibly other principals can avoid pitfalls.

CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS OF DATA

Introduction

In this chapter, an analysis of data about principals' perceptions toward accountability, the effects of accountability, and the dominant leadership framework from which the principals operate is provided.

This study aimed to address four main research questions:

1. What are the perceptions of elementary school principals towards accountability?
2. How has accountability affected the leadership role of a school principal?
3. What leadership frameworks do school principals most often perceive that are necessary for accountability success?
4. How leaders are managing their perceptions in this age of high accountability to create success?

In addition to answering these questions, I also set out to provide a forum in which participants could be given an opportunity to provide their in-depth perspectives. In so doing it was critical to design a study that enabled participants to share their experiences and for their voices to be heard. This data is organized in a manner that enables those voices to be heard. I provided direct responses from participants that are categorized by themes that emerged through analysis of their shared experiences.

Organization of Data Analysis

The data in this chapter are organized by patterns and themes that emerged from the responses of the participants. The process of open coding was used to create overall categories. After that I assembled into the axial coding process, and then used selective coding to connect the responses for the final phase. The participants were not viewed merely as data producers for this research. Rather, each individual shared his/her journey in the principalship and his/her perceptions. Therefore, all of the information shared in this chapter is shared from the point-of-view of the participants.

Each part of this chapter provides feedback from participants around general themes related to the research questions. Most of the information shared in this chapter reveals insight into the perceptions of elementary school principals, the effects of accountability on them, and the dominant framework they used to create success. The participants openly shared their perspectives, their experiences, and how they have been impacted.

Participants shared the effects of accountability as it related to question two and the direct leadership frameworks as it relates to research question three. Some offered suggestions to those responsible for creating accountability guidelines and laws. Of course, some of that advice differed based on the participants' experience and the type of school they were leading.

The analysis and proposed application are interwoven throughout the text of the responses shared by the participants. This chapter includes direct remarks taken from participant interviews. It was important to maintain the direct responses in the words of

the participants rather than summarizing. Again, this allowed for participants' voices to be heard, enabling their perspectives to speak for themselves.

Each research question subheading was developed based on the responses of the participants. This was done after careful opening, axial, and selective coding. The subheadings provide a direct connection between each question, subcategories, and the responses of both groups.

Analysis of Data

In the analysis of the data, grounded theory was used. It allowed for a better understanding of the experiences of the participants and provided opportunities for the researcher to perform multiple readings of the data. Open coding, axial coding, and selective coding were used to identify the emerging patterns, categories, and themes.

The first level of analysis was open coding. This is where every interview was recorded including every word and sentence of the transcript and reread to determine the overarching meaning of the data. Furthermore, the researcher listened for any significant words and phrases. These were noted for emerging patterns or themes.

The next level was axial coding to converge on the significant words and phrases that were reoccurring in the participants' responses. I reread the data and determined the overall themes by analyzing similarities and differences and possible relationships among the categories.

The final phase was the selective coding in which the data were reviewed for dominant and subordinate themes. All of the individual transcripts were merged into one

and corresponding categories determined. The data was separated according to the research question.

In the sections that follow, participants speak to their perceptions of accountability, the effects of accountability, and the leadership framework that helped them to create success in their schools. Furthermore, an effort was given to provide an opportunity for participants to tell about their particular career-long experience. This was important because their perceptions did not begin when they became principals, but in some cases it was solidified. These principals served many years as teachers, assistant principals, central office personnel, and in other roles in the field of education before ever becoming an elementary school principal.

The response provided by equity plus and non-equity plus principals were provided throughout in order to capture the similarities and differences between the two groups. After careful review of all the participant's responses, principals in both groups had similar perspectives. The major difference noted was in the questions about the leadership frameworks.

Research Question 1: Beliefs about Accountability

Research Question 1: What are the perceptions of elementary principals towards accountability?

This first research question was focused solely on participants' feelings about accountability, and probing questions emerged based on the research reviewed. The categories were about the beliefs and perceptions of testing as it relates to accountability,

testing and the impact on principals, monetary rewards, and sanctions being administered.

Below are the categories:

- Testing improving students' academic performance
- Testing measuring the effectiveness of student performance
- Testing improving the education of all
- Whether or not non-academic factors should be considered
- Test results reflecting principals' leadership abilities
- Testing making a principal a more focused instructional leader
- Principals being held accountable for test results
- Monetary rewards given for performance
- Sanctions

Continuing the coding process, I read all transcripts from the audiotapes gathered during the interviews and noticed relevant words, phrases, and sentences that emerged from the data. I began to construct specific categories that emerged from the data.

At the start of the analysis phase, sixteen overarching provisional categories emerged from the data: (a) Accountability is critical, (b) Instructional leaders, (c) Emphasis on testing, (d) Restructuring of accountability, (e) Focus on the whole child, (f) Producing better leaders, (g) Consider other factors, (h) Principals skills matching the school they serve, (i) Testing limitations; (j) Demographics within the school, (k) Testing as sole indicator, (l) Intrinsic motivations, (m) Empowering others, (n) An equity issue, (o) Pressure on principals, and (p) Sanctions being punitive.

The review of this initial phase enabled me to gain a deeper perspective of the participants' experiences and their perspectives. Subsequently, I continued to utilize the process of open coding to bring forth any provisional categories that emerged. After review of the notes, listening to the digital recordings, and rereading all the transcripts from the individual interviews, I looked for specific dimensions within each category.

Using the process of axial coding, categories were formed and subcategories created based on the specific relationships that had emerged from the data.

Participants' Views of Accountability

The first major category for this research question is accountability. Quotes from the individual interviews are provided in this section about the research question, "What are the perceptions of elementary school principals towards accountability?" The responses are organized in the context of the four identified categories for this research question as shown in Table 3: (a) Participants' Views of Accountability, (b) Testing Concerns, (c) Influence on Leadership, and (d) Other Factors to Consider.

A principal's perception is always interwoven and linked to all previous experiences. Each participant shared their perceptions about accountability and believed that while accountability is critical, it is too much emphasis on testing. It was important for them to be able to reflect on their past experiences, examine their current practices, and formulate their perspectives. Of course, all of this impacts the way in which they think and operate as school leaders.

Table 3

Four Categories with Subcategories for Research Question 1

Participants Views of Accountability	Testing Concerns	Influence on Leadership	Other Factors to Consider
Fair and equitable	Test what is taught	Empower others	Qualitative factors
Critical	Credibility issues	Pressure on principals	Testing skills
Focus on the whole child	Too much emphasis	Strong instructional leader	Demographics
Need growth model	Provides guidance	Guides framework	Intrinsic motivators
Alternative assessments	Change method	Match skills of principal with school	Social, emotional, psychological
Sanctions punitive	Limitations	Produce better leaders	Talent of students

Participant 1 shared:

Accountability for student performance is critical and that the term high stakes testing has given a bad name to the importance of accountability. I think developing systems in which we can fairly and equitably determine how are students are progressing is important. If you have the right leadership in place, I think that is more important than high stakes testing.

Participant 6 conveyed:

I believe that accountability for student performance is critical; I believe that the term high stakes testing has given a bad name to the importance of accountability. I think as educators we have to take very close introspective into how students are achieving, I think developing systems in which we can fairly and equitably determine how are students are progressing is important. I have impacted what we do on a daily basis obviously. I believe in accountability and I believe it is important to have it and as an educational leader it is my role to empower teachers

to create those structures in which our kids achieve because to me it boils down to our kids making it. Main questions that I ask teachers to ask is that are kids getting it and accountability in its true sense serves to do that and we need to make sure that the measures we use are fair and we look at the whole child as oppose to a broad brush approach.

Three out of the five principals in highly impacted schools did believe that accountability improved academic performance. Some shared that it needed to be some type of accountability, but a focus needs to be on the whole child

Surprisingly, principals in non-highly impacted schools had mixed beliefs.

Participant 8 exclaimed:

there needs to be accountability. I do have an issue with testing. I think too much emphasis is placed on testing to where if principals are in the classroom, know the curriculum and know what the teachers are teaching, um that they can make a difference that way. If principals give teachers the latitude and longitude to instruct as they need to, to take that child, to take risk, then they are going to be successful with those children.

Participant 6 responded:

Well, I do think that there needs to be some type of accountability and it needs to be some type of normed accountability, but I think the lack of emphasis on children's ability and what they already bring to the table um is the piece that is sadly missing. We know that children learn differently. Um, we know that because of disabilities have a different set of skills that they bring to the table. So when we put high stakes testing out there without consideration for that particular piece, then we put those children at a huge disadvantage. Additionally, when we don't look at the role of socio-economic status and cultural pieces, um, what role they play in a child's learning style, we also put those children at a huge disadvantage as well. I don't think that they necessarily improve it. If you have the right leadership in place, I think that is more important than high stakes testing.

One of her colleagues, Participant 4, in a similar school stressed that she did not think that the high stakes testing actually improve performance.

Similar responses emerged from many of the principals and I was able to sort into one of the four categories. They shared that accountability is critical, but that it should be fair and equitable. Many believed that there needed to be some form of accountability, perhaps a growth model. Some participants mentioned a focus needs to be on the whole child (i.e., finding a way to account for other skills of students). Other participants mentioned that there needs to be a different assessment all together and there is too much academic pressure that focuses on sanction that do not work. Participant 2 shared:

I believe in accountability, um I think we should have some other forms of assessments. All kids do not do well on just a paper and pencil assessment. What about a portfolio, there are other forms as to how we can measure students.

Testing Concerns

Some of the participants shared that accountability in public schools is uniformed and a quick way for educators, statisticians, politicians, and lawmakers to assess whether or not students are learning. Some agree that while this is the most convenient national model, testing to this magnitude is not what is best for kids and that there is too much emphasis placed on testing.

Participant 3, in an Equity Plus school, shared:

I believe if you have a student who tests well, it does a very good job of measuring their ability or the effectiveness of how they know, but we live in a day and age where the high stakes test produces so much stress because we put so

much on it that it is not an indication of how much the child knows, but an indication of how well the child can test.

Another response from Participant 10 had an opposite viewpoint and stated:

When I look at testing measuring the effectiveness of student performance um I really do have to say again that um it does not necessary measure the performance of each student's performance, just one day it is a snap shot in that child's life.

Participant 9, who serves a non-highly impacted school, believes that:

I think for the most part that it really does. I have looked at each and every child's profile in this building. I always do that in schools. I, um, was a low performing school when I was at this particular school. So, we just rolled up our sleeves and did everything that we could do to ensure that each and every child would be successful. So, I do believe that it does measure the effectiveness of student performance with a pretty high percentage of validity.

The majority of these principals serving in non-highly impacted schools believed that testing does not measure the effectiveness of student performance.

Overall, principals shared some of the following responses:

If students test well, it can measure the effectiveness, testing does not give a full picture of what the child can do, it tests what is taught, we need to consider the whole child, it needs to be more diagnostic, it provides only a snapshot, we should use other measures, we need open-ended tests, and it serves as a baseline and provides guidance in what we need to do for the child.

Participant 8 expressed:

I believe there needs to be accountability. I do have an issue with testing. I think too much emphasis is placed on testing to where if principals are in the classroom, know the curriculum and know what the teachers are teaching, um that they can

make a difference that way. If principals give teachers the latitude and longitude to instruct as they need to, to take that child, to take risk, then they are going to be successful with those children. Again, I don't want to and I am not interested in levels one, two, three or four. I am more interested in growth. So, a child may be at level 1 and show me the growth and that is what is more important. You can be at level 4 and not show any growth, I have a problem with that. So, for me it is not about testing, it is about teaching.

As emphasized in the NCLB law, a focus is on every subgroup that is reported within a school. It remains to be seen as to whether or not testing has actually improved the education of all students within public education. Some educators have seen a shift of focus to students who are in minority subgroups, but not a significant improvement in their achievement.

Again, Participant 2, in an Equity Plus school, believes that it does improve the education of all students to some degree and shared:

I think it does improve some. I would not categorize it as generally all. I think that test does benefit some students. It makes them aware that they have the ability to master skills, whether it is a concept or a computation concept. So, it does have some benefits, but not for all students. It provides guidance.

Two principals out of the highly impacted schools group explained that testing improves the education of all students and three shared that it does not improve.

Principals in both groups shared the following viewpoints about testing improving the education for all students:

There are some credibility issues with the test, it benefits some students who test well, it limits creativity and empowerment, it creates a sense of hysteria, kids have different learning styles, kids are not developmentally ready for the test, the test

should not serve as the sole indicator, it has created accountability for all, and it gives you a place to start. There needs to be a change method.

Influence on Leadership

This question allowed me to not only probe about perceptions of accountability in general, but it gave me an opportunity to have them to reflect upon their leadership abilities. Based on the body language, principals appeared a little more reflective and thoughtful in sharing.

Many of the participants believe that testing does reflect upon the leader that is serving the school and those principals should be held accountable and it was evident in the data collected.

Participant 1 recalled:

I think that it affects it to a degree because I believe that everything rises and falls on the leadership. So if our school makes it or doesn't make it, I think it relies on how my leadership style empowers or create a sense within teachers to look at how our kids achieve I've been at my current school for five years and we have gone up and down. While I realize that there are other factors to impact student achievement. I do realize that the most important factor is how I lead teachers to help kids.

Participant 2 shared:

I do not think that my leadership abilities are impacted by my school test scores because I as a leader can do everything in my power to make students aware of what they should know and do, but what they actually do is another whole factor. So, I do not think that my leadership abilities affect the testing and scores from my school. I do agree that it is a lot of pressure on principals.

All four principals serving Equity Plus schools shared that their school's test results reflect their leadership abilities; only Participant 2 viewed it differently.

Participant 1 articulated:

I think that it affects it to a degree because I believe that everything rises and falls on the leadership. So if our school makes it or doesn't make it, I think it relies on how my leadership style empowers or create a sense within teachers to look at how our kids achieve I've been at my current school for five years and we have gone up and down. When I first came our school based on the testing had some challenges and while we have maintained having slight challenges throughout we were making progress to success and just this past year, we took a dramatic dip the other way and so I have to ask what is it that I need to do from a leadership standpoint to cause that. While I realize that there are other factors to impact student achievement. I do realize that the most important factor is how I lead teachers to help kids.

All principals expressed at some point that it is the leadership style of the principal, you must empower others, lots of pressure on a school principal, it takes a team to make it happen, you must create an atmosphere of trust, allow freedom and do not teach to the test, you must change strategies and methods, you have to be a very strong instructional leader, everything rises and falls with leadership, you must lead teachers and produce positive results, and test results are indicative of the leader's abilities.

Other Factors to Consider

Some school systems use a variety of data to make decisions about students and how well they perform. In the state of NC, schools are held to the mandates of NCLB and the state accountability model. If non-academic factors were considered with the test results, it could include such items as a portfolio, a narrative about each child, or a

product based measurement. The challenge would be to find a reliable way to measure the progress of proficiency of such items.

Participant 3 expressed: “I think we do that sometimes when we look at our standard error of measurement and consider other qualitative factors.”

Participant 6 indicated the following:

I think you have to look at the whole child and there are non-academic factors that come into play. I don't think tough that those factors should be used as an excuse for kids not being successful. I think you run a fine line looking at the factors and how they can address or impact a child's progress and using those factors as excuses, but if you are talking about the whole child and we are teaching the whole child, and consider the testing skills.

Participant 7 expressed:

I really think that one shot, three day four day testing that you give kids again is not a true measure. I think taking kids where they were as far as giving them a portfolio a um capstone project that we do when we were in school or some kind of, we talk about 21st century skills to do something with entrepreneurship do something with civic literacy, do a project that encompasses a lot of the discipline there and not simply just give them a test that simply have them to guess, but I think the fact that there are some other areas that we could do to really help with the academic factors. I think conferencing with the kids is a huge help because it give an opportunity for the kids to express what they truly know.

Again, it was unanimous with this group of principals, serving non-highly impacted schools, that they all agreed that non-related academic factors should be considered with test results.

The combined responses echoed by many included that accountability should include other types of indicators. This will give a better picture of the child, as we know.

Kids have different talents and one should consider the whole child, consider the humanities, and the demographics of your school, and the overall social, emotional, and psychological well being of each child.

Research Question 2: Impact of Accountability

Research Question 2: How has accountability affected the role of a school principal?

After creating a framework about how participants perceived accountability, the analysis of the data for research question two, “How has accountability affected the leadership role of a school principal?” was conducted. Analysis of the data in regards to this question is structured within fourteen initial categories that were narrowed down to four through the process of coding. The fourteen initial categories were:

- Instructional leadership skills
- Professional development and growth
- Decision making process
- Focus on the arts
- Dealing with parents
- Dealing with students
- Dealing with other educators
- Dealing with your school community
- Marketing your school
- Day-to-day leadership role
- Accountability challenges

- Technology skills
- Social, emotional, physical well
- Other implications of accountability

The review of this phase enabled me to gain a deeper perspective of how accountability has affected the leadership role of a school principal. After a careful review of the notes, listening to the digital recordings, and rereading all the transcripts from the individual interviews, I looked for specific common phrases, patterns and themes. Categories were formed and subcategories created based on the specific information that had emerged from the data. As shown in Table 4, I was able to establish four basic categories for this research question.

Principals' Skills

The first major category for this research question is principals' skills. Quotes from the individual interviews are provided in this section about the research question. The responses are organized in the context of the four identified categories for this research question: (a) Principals' Skills, (b) Principals' Ability to Communicate, (c) Professional Challenges, and (d) Personal Challenges.

Accountability has placed lots of pressure upon school principals due to all the demands and mandates written into the NCLB Law. Therefore, school principals feel the stress of accountability and it definitely impacts their role, perspectives, and all other aspects of school leadership. A journey into their views reveals how it impacts them personally and professionally.

Table 4

Four Categories with Subcategories for Research Question 2

Principals' Skills	Principals' Ability to Communicate	Professional Challenges	Personal Challenges
Focused on data	Provide information	Paperwork	Physical
Quality time in classrooms	Communicate the data	Many responsibilities	Psychological
Look at teacher effectiveness	Focused conversations	Quality in classrooms	Health issues
Focus on reading	Advocate	Integration of all content areas	Time
Use best practices	Continuous improvement	Achievement	Social
Holistic approach	Collaborate	Monitoring	Career
Needs of students	Seek input	Financial responsibilities	Stigma that comes with failure
Keeps abreast of Trends	Rely on others	Public Relations	Public persona
Must possess technology skills	Follow protocol within the district	Accountability to all within the school community	Competition with colleagues

Participant 8 shared:

Um, it has just made me more, well the good thing is the plus, and it has made me more data driven. I was not as data driven as I needed to be. I would look at it some and now we are analyzing it, I know what to look for, um, for us we have been fortunate because we have done well. Um, that hasn't affected me too negatively. However, we still have challenges. Um, we have an achievement gap, not a huge one, but there is still an achievement gap between majority and minority students.

Accountability has impacted the focus of the conversations that school we have with our students. While we are still a strong advocate for them, we really take time to analyze the data and share with students the importance of doing well, completing their work and behaving in school. (Participant 3)

Another participant stated:

One thing with professional development for me is I look for um anything that has reading instruction um my goal is to read an educational leadership magazine per month um my goal is to read all PLC minutes, I attend all PLC meetings. I spend a lot of time during post observation conference as more of a coaching mechanism, not as you did not do things right. I spend a lot of time with my curriculum coordinator.

Comments shared by all of the participants in both types of schools were a collective voice that echoed: they are data driven, they analyze the data and look at achievement gaps, they make sure it is addressed in our school improvement plan, and they are focused and focused on common areas. Many spend more times in classrooms, asking questions. The instructional skills have been impacted tremendously, they better understand what an instructional leader is responsible for and make solid decisions. Principals agreed that accountability has helped their leadership skills, they are more cognizant, and set goals that are instructionally sound. Principals are keenly aware, the instruction is targeted and it addresses specific needs. The level of conversation is different and they look at the instructional delivery. Principals shared that they were more reflective and that allowed them to learn more about themselves, and how to trust others.

These commonalities were interwoven into all of their responses as they shared about how their instructional leadership skills had been impacted. Several common

viewpoints were shared. They indicated that they attended professional development especially for principals, they've looked at best practices and strategies, and most recently had training with the teacher evaluations instrument. It is focused staff development, lots of reading built into their plan, development about data, and they discuss more with their colleagues.

The most common theme in this section was about attending staff development that was district directed, all of which were related to teacher evaluation and data.

According to Participant 10,

It has forced me to consider going back to school. I read more. Definitely, my professional development has been stepped up and I am eager to gain more knowledge. Again, I read more than I have ever read just to stay abreast of current trends.

All principals expressed similar views in regards to how accountability impacted their decision making process. Their responses were: they try to use a holistic approach, they definitely look at data because accountability is the vehicle for making these decisions, and they shared that the buck stops with them. Principals look critically at decisions because it has a great impact, it impacts staffing, materials, and personnel. They are very focused in everything. They focus on the children and attend meetings and PLCs so that they can make the best decisions. Some did express that money allocations have a lot to do with their decisions, and they tend to be very strategic.

As shared, principals look at all aspects of how decisions will impact students, staff, and the school. They know that they must be more focused on the needs of the

students than the needs of the adults serving the students, but all are important. These principals realize the pressure of maintaining or attaining good test results, but also know the importance of integrating the arts and other school initiatives into improving the overall achievement of students by bringing in the arts.

Principals' Ability to Communicate

This category focuses on public relations as it relates to school and the sharing of important information. “There are many in the community who directly impact your school and some are working in conjunction with other organizations to find ways to assist” (Participant 6). Therefore, it is critical for school principals to plan as to how they will address the community.

Participant 1 exclaimed,

It goes back to my earlier comment; it is about communicating that as a school this is a positive and good place to be. It is a strong place to be and it is about informing the community that an article in the paper or a blur on the TV/news show does not tell the whole picture—I invite community involvement and to be a part of who we are I welcome it, I encourage it, I go after it, so I think the main thing is that whatever picture is being painted is an accurate picture. That my biggest role.

Participants shared common points. That is, they give parents notifications and expressed how they do not want them to be overwhelmed by data talk. Principals shared that parents are more concerned with how their child can read. Test results are published, they communicate the data, and keep parents informed. Many times parents do not understand all the data stuff and many shared that it has not really changed as to how they

relate to parents. Parents do not ask too much about all the data and the parents are not driven by data.

Overall, parents are dealt with in the same way when it comes to accountability and accountability has not impacted how principals deal with parents. That is, they focus on their particular child and want to make sure they are having fun and learning.

All respondents had some similarities. They were that they talk about accountability and testing, the conversations are more focused on continuous improvement. Principals stay focused as a school leader, they value their input, they learn about what other people do in their school, discuss in meetings, lots of talking and thinking together, they ask them questions, and reach out to them.

It is apparent that this is a job that cannot be done alone. Many principals reach out to one another for support and ways to improve. They focus their conversations mostly on testing, accountability, and how to move students' academic progress.

They believe that a principal needs to put themselves in position to be the "drum major" for their school. They stay focused on their role and let the community do what they need to do to meet the needs of the kids. Lots of community conversations need to take place, they heighten the awareness, business partners are really involved and they really don't ask about test scores, there is a lot more publicity and we keep them informed.

Several themes emerged and that is, principals keep community organizations and those involved abreast of what is going on with the school. Also, a lot of public relations

work has to be done to keep them engaged. While the public is aware of testing and all the demands, they do not focus solely on test scores.

Professional Challenges

The daily responsibilities of a school principal are massive and almost humanly impossible. Many of the principals shared their perceptions of how accountability has impacted this even more. This particular category focused on the challenges school principals faced due to all the accountability requirements and mandates.

Principals serving in equity plus and non-equity plus schools, shared that they have a lot of paperwork requirements, completing the evaluation of employees, wearing many different hats and having to manage the managers. Lots of time is spent in the classrooms, being visible, less time for personal relationships, attend PLCs and learning team meetings, and lots of time spent in the classrooms doing classroom walk-throughs.

Participant 3 exclaimed,

I think our responsibility of being in classrooms every day, highest visibility. It is probably one of the biggest challenges that I have as a school administrator. If you are at school during school hours, you should be working and observing with teachers and students because you do not get to see them once school is out. So, all of the things that do not relate to students, parents, and teachers, you should be doing after hours or before hours. Um, and I think that day-to-day leadership role to say that if I can't do it during the day with kids, I am not going to have the chance to do it at night or on the weekends. I can always do paperwork in the afternoons or early in the morning and I can always take a whole boat load of things home.

No matter how consistent the responses, principals shared their experience in trying to get it all done. They are responsible for all that happens in their school and that responsibility

is great. Many of them talked about the day-to-day duties and how they spend majority of their time in the classrooms due to accountability.

Personal Welfare

The stress is tremendous and the pressure of accountability is demanding, but principals create their own ways of managing.

Participant 5 expressed:

I think some days I have more physical ailments. This is a twenty-four seven job. This is not something that you can walk away from when you leave this building. I think that it takes a toll on people and if you don't balance it effectively with your family life—I would not advise any newly young married person to come into this even with children—you know when would you have time for your family. So, it is a balancing act.

Many participants stated that accountability can make you a nervous wreck and believe that you can't personalize all this, it can be very taxing. They try to keep everything into perspective while it is known to impact their personal time, physical and medical issues are present. Some believed that they were one task away from a meltdown. They try to take care of themselves and do special things, lots of emotional impact. It can be a challenge and very demanding, it takes a toll on people, and they focus on the positive things.

As Participant 2 shared:

A lot of prayer—I think you have to put things in prospective and come to the realization that you took this role on it is one that you need to value keeping in mind that you have to do things ethically. You have to pay attention to what is

expected of you—if you don't put the children first then you should not be in this position.

The demands of accountability have a direct and obvious impact on school principals.

Principals must find effective ways to deal with the social and emotional effects. Many of the principals in both groups expressed the same sentiments.

Participant 9 expressed:

Yes, it has impacted it not so much social, but certainly emotional. You know you can go to Joint Principals and elementary principals' meetings, any of the principals meetings and you can look at just how people sit in the room, you can look at the dependent upon the agenda item, the heat, the smoke coming up out of some ears and noses because they are very passionate. It all goes back to what I said earlier about equity and how we are designed in this system.

Research Question 3: Predominant Leadership Framework

Research Question 3: What leadership framework do school principals most often perceive is necessary for accountability success?

Direct information from the participants that responded to the research question, “What leadership frameworks do school principals most often perceive that are necessary for accountability success?” is provided in this section. Findings from the individual interviews are organized into the confines of the four categories: (a) Instructional Leadership, (b) Transformational Leadership, (c) Integrated Leadership, and (d) Moral Leadership.

These leadership frameworks were selected due to the fact that they were the most discussed frameworks mentioned when addressing school reform. The participants shared how moral leadership had a silver lining in all of the other three frameworks presented.

The review of this phase enabled me to gain a deeper understanding of how each leadership framework is necessary for accountability success. After reviewing the responses and rereading all the data, I looked for common themes. Categories were formed and subcategories created based on the specific information that had emerged from the data. The opening, axial, and selective coding process was used to connect responses to categories. As shown in the Table 5, the four confined categories had several subcategories. While each framework is important, principals shared their thoughts based on their experiences about each framework and provided insights into their perspectives.

Instructional Leadership Perceptions

Of course, this leadership framework entails the action a school principal must take to promote growth in student learning. The focus is on the curriculum, assessment, teaching, and learning and all are critical components in this framework. The respondents shared that instructional leadership is essential to accountability success and in this day and age of accountability; you must be a strong instructional leader and know how to empower others to expand their capacity to lead in this area.

Participant 3 shared:

Principals are identified as being the instructional leader within their school. I think that takes on a lot of shapes and the hope is that it becomes more of an instructional piece than a management piece in terms of curriculum resources, curriculum delivery, trying to develop systems that will work through the

curriculum and assessments. Try to measure and modify day-to-day instructional delivery.

Table 5

Four Categories with Subcategories for Research Question 3

Instructional Leadership	Transformational Leadership	Integrated Leadership	Moral Leadership
Focuses on curriculum	Focuses on organizational objectives	Everyone takes on responsibility	Foundation of leadership
Uses effective assessments	Possesses a strong vision and mission	Focuses on the students	Must possess with accountability
Teachers' teaching ability heightened	Builds capacity	Produces change in style	Sets tone for positive environment
Focuses on learning	Accountability creates transformation	Involves all stakeholders	Empowers others
Must be a strong instructional leader	Helps to create success	Develops leaders	Universal ethics
Monitoring increases	Assists with developing non-negotiables	Creates a sense of belonging	Produces equity and equality
Yields support and guidance	Produces alignment of initiatives	Leads to unity	Creates self-reflection
Uses data to make decisions	Focuses on environment and culture	Creates mutual influences	Produces meaningful work
Must know the school's test results	Helps to expand leadership skills	Examines all aspects	Hones stewardship skills
Empowers others to be leaders	Data must support the need	Impacts decision making process	Provides networking to faith organizations

The respondents shared that instructional leadership is essential to accountability success and in this day and age of accountability; you must be a strong instructional leader and know how to empower others to expand their capacity to lead in this area.

Participant 6 explained:

Well, I think it is at the crux of what you do because I think when you're talking about accountability. There again, my fundamental belief with what you do with instruction raises eyebrows, how you do it and why you do it is a direct correlation to what your scores will look like at the end of the year.. So, as an instructional leader you are doing the same things that you are asking your staff to do.

Participant 5 affirmed: "I think that is probably the most important. If you don't know or if you are not strong in the area of instruction, it's like the blind leading the blind. It's imperative."

All participants shared at some point that being an instructional leader is at the crux of what a principal does and critical. They believed principals are identified as being the instructional leader, the must know the curriculum and about assessments in order to make decisions, one cannot be successful without it, and it allows the principal to focus on learning. Also, it was mentioned that the instructional capacity within the building must be expanded by allowing others to be leaders.

Transformational Leadership Perceptions

The principals shared that this type of leadership framework is important. It focuses on the ability to create valuable and positive change in followers and focuses on the organizational objectives. Principals discussed their own experiences and how

important it is to tap into their transformational leadership skills when needed within their schools. Many linked the fact that accountability has driven them to this framework because of all the demands and changes needed to fulfill mandated requirements.

Many of the participants shared similar viewpoints as the ones below and discussed the importance of having the skills and knowing when to transform a school.

Participant 10 articulated:

Everyone needs to be valued and must see the change and why it is important when you are going through a transformation. Even the kids must know why a change is needed when it is not working. So, the transformational model is important to the success of a school.

Participant 1 shared:

I think this is necessary and depending on where your school is even if you are a school that has done well. I think you have to do adjustments. You may not have to do complete overhauls like we had to do in this building I don't think that you should ever get to a point where you are stagnant. Transformational in my mind does not mean that you have to do major overhaul, but it does mean that you should constantly be looking at what you are doing—is there a better way to do it. Accountability has created the need to transform.

Some of the same similarities shared were: it is necessary and you have to do adjustments, to make it meaningful and move from one level to the next, you have to transform the environment, it depends on the demographics within your school as how you transform, it is vital, necessary at various times, you need to know the culture of your staff and how to transform, help people to see why there is a need to transform, it is important and change takes time, and it is necessary when major shifts are needed.

Several principals serving equity plus schools mentioned that it helps the school to focus on the organizational objectives, the mission and vision are at the foundation of the need to transform, and it creates the focus on the climate and culture within the school.

Integrated Leadership Perceptions

This framework focuses on a combination of many frameworks that benefit the entire school organization and rests heavily upon shared leadership. Principals shared openly about their perceptions.

Participant 2 responded:

You know when you take that whole piece into account you're looking at how you are accountable to them, how you are accountable to the community, how you are accountable to the teachers. All of that coming together makes you take a step back and think am I doing what is best. I think if you keep what's best for children and other outlining constituents to be held accountable to –once you do that you have made the grade and you can't please everybody all of the time.

Participant 3 shared:

We should be doing a better job at having vertical conversations and I think that that is where the integrated leadership comes. If I am a kindergarten teacher and all I focus on is kindergarten, I am really not doing what's best for my kids, but what's happening in first, second, third grades, either with structures or skill so knowledge base then certainly will have a better impact or better opportunity to impact what my kids are learning in kindergarten to better prepare and for have comes next.

Principals shared that it is important to integrate many different voices, stakeholders have to engage in all parts of the school, leadership is needed across the

school, you are accountable to all, it is necessary, shared leadership is important with everybody working together, you have got to have it, develop leaders within your school, and it needs to be a shared responsibility.

Participant 7 stated:

Yeah, I think that it has to be a shared responsibility. A principal can't do the job by himself. It is one of those things that we have to be able to have shared leadership and distributive leadership- create teacher leaders, because ultimately if you don't you will not have any emotional, social, or physical wellbeing. One must look at all aspects with the school and this definitely impacts decision making.

These principals believe it must be that everyone is working together for the greater good of the school and a shared sense of responsibility is needed to ensure success within the school. This type of leadership yields unity and creates a sense of belonging.

Moral Leadership Perceptions

This type of leadership is grounded in universal ethics that empower others and encourage one to uphold positive characteristics to promote the school as an organization. Principals shared that at the foundation of a school that is successful, moral leadership is an underpinning characteristic. Several principals shared that moral leadership is a way to set the tone for a healthy school environment.

Participant 6 shared:

I think even more important for you to set that high standard of expectation and there again when I came here there was a lot of talk about things that teachers were doing on the weekend-bar hopping and why we can most certainly do what

we want to with our own time, we have to be cognizant of the fact that we are still viewed in the community by many to be held to a higher standard.

Participant 1 explained:

Again, I think it is a process in which we engage all parts of the school community. This thing about stakeholders- when you engage the entire school community and help the community feel like they are part of the school environment—back in the days when we came along school- the schoolhouse was the hub of the community and I think the way you have your school, you are going back to that model, your building does not close at four, you are part of the community and that kind of integration leads to success. It builds a sense of belonging and when you belong to something, you will work to make sure that something is always at its best. So, I think it is important because you have to bring others along, creating that sense of belonging is what makes all the difference.

In essence, principals shared that they are held to higher standards, and there are core things that are unbending and part of their core beliefs. Principals must have personal and ethical principles, everyone is held accountable, and certain things are non-negotiable due to accountability. These principals believe that moral leadership is part of the foundation to success when it comes to accountability. They think that it should be interwoven throughout all parts of the school and the principal should be viewed as the guide of moral leadership.

Most of the principals in highly impacted schools believed that instructional and transformational leadership lead them to success in their school and principals in non-highly impacted schools believe that it was a variation or components of all leadership frameworks depending on what was needed to be addressed at the time. Instructional and transformational were the predominant frameworks mentioned in both groups. This lead

to my belief that based on the demographics within the school, the more highly impacted your school is, the more the principal had to focus on instruction and on transforming the school.

School principals also felt that instructional leadership is the most important framework that leads to accountability success. In addition, they felt that all of the frameworks are needed at different times depending on what the school needed and what the principal needed to accomplish.

All principals had some type or exposure to all leadership frameworks through professional development, reading, experience in the field of education, specially designed leadership programs for principals, and graduate classes.

Research Question 4: Strategies for Success

Research Question 4: How do leaders manage their perceptions in this age of high stakes accountability to create success?

After exploring principals' perceptions about accountability, the effects of accountability and principals' perceptions of the four leadership frameworks, the focus was now on the final research question, "How do leaders manage their perceptions in this age of high stakes accountability to create success?" Analysis of the data in regards to this question is structured within three categories that were defined through the process of coding: (a) Techniques for principals, (b) Shaping a positive culture, and (c) Personal well-being.

As I continued the coding process, I reread all transcripts from the audiotapes gathered during the interviews and noticed relevant words, phrases, and patterns that

emerged from the data. The review of this phase enabled me to gain more insight into the participants' experiences and their perspectives. Subsequently, I continued to utilize the process of open coding to bring forth any provisional categories that emerged. After another review of the notes, listening to the digital recordings, and rereading all the transcripts from the individual interviews, I looked for specific dimensions within each category.

Using the process of axial coding, categories were formed and subcategories created based on the specific relationships that had emerged from the data. As shown in the table below, I was able to establish three overarching categories for this research question. Categories were formed and subcategories created based on the specific information that had emerged from the participants' responses. The categories are listed in Table 6.

Techniques for Principals

The first major category is techniques for principals. Quotes from the individual interviewees are provided in this section. Principals shared their thoughts based on their experiences about managing their perceptions in this high stakes testing environment. The principals' perception is always linked to all previous experiences whether they encountered success or not. Each participant shared their perceptions and believed that while success is critical, it is too much emphasis placed on testing. It was important for them to be able to reflect on their past, examine their current practices, and formulate their perspectives. Of course, all of this impacts the way in which they think and how they manage to create success.

Table 6

Three Categories with Subcategories for Research Question 4

Techniques for Principals	Shaping a Positive Culture	Personal Well-Being
Focus on the children	Build leadership capacity	Take care of self
Prioritize responsibilities	Use team approach	Try to create balance
Keep abreast of latest research	Build upon small successes	Engage in physical activity
Address challenges	Celebrate accomplishments	Socialize with others
Delegate	Hold true to ethical beliefs	Relieve stress
Be strategic in leading	Seek advice and input	Pray and rely on religious beliefs
Align initiatives	Focus on positive things	Seek assistance when needed

Participant 2 shared: “We should be working for what’s best for the kids that we serve in the building that we are the principal of.” Many of the principals, whether in equity plus schools or not, echoed some of the same beliefs about how they manage to create success is by focusing on the students and their needs and they try to make the best decisions and be very strategic.

Participant 1 articulated:

I keep the focus on the students and try to make all my decision based on what will positively impact them. I know in the end that is what matters the most.

As shared, principals look at all aspects of how decisions will affect those that they serve. They know that they must be more focused on the needs of the students than the needs of the adults to create the kind of success they desire, but all are important. Principals manage in a variety of ways, but many of the same themes became apparent as they all find ways to address the on-going challenges.

Participant 10 expressed:

I prioritize the many responsibilities and put things into perspective, I manage with a team of people, make sure that the environment is positive, I delegate responsibilities, I try to make it an enjoyable place for people to come to work, I try not to take it home, and lean on others to help.

Shaping a Positive Culture

This category allowed the participants a venue for me to see their leadership characteristics and more of their internal beliefs about their leadership style. They shared more about the ways in which they dealt with managing from a personal aspect.

Participant 4 shared:

I rely on my faith and keep what is important at the forefront. We make a difference and we have to keep that in mind. We have to remember why we do what we do and let that drive our day-to-day actions.

Participant 1 articulated:

I try to keep everything into perspective. I try to remember that we are dealing with children and whatever we do it is about kids. I try to help minimize for teachers the amount of internalization that they do about this process. Sometimes they do it anyways, to some degree it is healthy, but not to an obsessive degree. As an individual I try not to take it home but sometimes I do. Oprah Winfrey

made a comment—once you know better, you do better and I really think and know that we will do better and we'll continue to make great strides with kids and I am not going to take it personal.

Again, principals in both groups focused on the positive things about their school, built upon the small successes in every area, even those areas unrelated to testing, celebrated accomplishments, and the held true to their moral ethics and beliefs even when times were seen by others as not successful. They managed to create success to some degree.

Personal Well-Being

This category had several subcategories that focused on how principals took care of themselves and ultimately this led to success within their schools. The success did not always show in their test data, but in other ways. Several principals in both groups stated that accountability makes them a nervous wreck and believe that one cannot personalize all that they have to deal with as a school leader. They try to keep everything in perspective while it is known to impact their available time, physical, social, and emotional well-being and it all has a direct impact on their perceptions and how they manage.

Participant 2 exclaimed:

I think some days I have more physical ailments. This is a twenty-four seven job. This is not something that you can walk away from when you leave this building. I think that it takes a toll on people and if you don't balance it effectively with your family life- I would not advise any newly young married person to come into this even with children- you know when would you have time for your family. So, it is a balancing act. If my children were younger, I would be like you know—I

just think it is a balancing act and you have to put it in perspective and sometimes you have to take time for yourself or you will burn out at a quick pace.

Some believed that they are one task away from a meltdown. They try to take care of themselves and do special things, lots of emotional impact. Many expressed that it can be a challenge and very demanding. They expressed that it can take a toll on leaders and they try to focus on the positive things; therefore creating a way to manage their perceptions in order to lead successfully.

Summary

This chapter provided a forum in which the perceptions of select school principals were heard. These principals shared about their perspectives of accountability. In addition, they shared about the effect of accountability, how they manage their perceptions to create success, and about the presented leadership frameworks. Their sharing was based on their experience as practicing elementary school principals. These perspectives were different depending on the type of school in which they were leading. Some led in highly impacted schools while others led in more affluent schools.

An interesting revelation was discovered based on the review of the literature in chapter two and findings in the research. The participants mentioned several of the same concerns about NCLB and principals' concerns. In addition, principals discussed characteristics of effective school leaders and common practices and expectations.

In regards to the perceptions of accountability, four major overarching categories were formed and principals shared their beliefs about accountability, testing, leadership, and other educational factors impacting education. The section about the effects of

accountability led to several subcategories, but four predominant categories such as principals' skills, public relations, challenges principals face, and other implications of the impact of accountability were established.

The focus on the four leadership frameworks allowed me to gain insights into principals' perception about how these frameworks impact their ability to succeed. The final question focused on principals managing their perceptions to create success yielded three major categories in which I categorized into professional prioritization, leadership techniques, and personal coping strategies.

Consequently, one may not be able to draw conclusive findings based on this study nor prescribe a set framework of strategies to ensure all principals are successful no matter the type of school principals lead. However, a focus has been generated and needs to continue if all schools are going to be success in this high era of accountability. The implication for practice is the topic of discussion in Chapter V.

CHAPTER V

INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS

Introduction

In this chapter, an interpretation of the data about principals' perceptions toward accountability, how accountability has affected their role, principals' perceptions about the four leadership frameworks, and principals' ability to manage their perceptions to create success was addressed.

Data collection for this study included principals' responses to interview questions. Questions were developed and explored to provide the overall focus. In research one tends to draw conclusions from the data by determining what it all means and what is to be made of it (Wolcott, 1994).

Further in the chapter, a brief overview of the findings is provided. The themes that surfaced while analyzing the data using the principles of grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) serve as the framework for the discussion. An in-depth discussion summarizes the findings in relation to each of the questions and the overriding implications are discussed.

In addition, the data presented in Chapter IV provided a detailed description of the perceptions of elementary school principals. The principals shared their beliefs and perceptions about testing as it relates to accountability, as well as the impact of

accountability on their role. In addition, they shared the perceptions of what dominant leadership framework they operated from to create success.

What Can Be Learned from this Research?

There are many implications of this study not only for the education profession, but also for practicing school principals. Those implications are discussed in this chapter in addition to making possible recommendations for further study. Concluding statements are discussed based on the relevance of this research.

Perceptions of Accountability

The primary focus question, “What are the perceptions of elementary school principals towards accountability?” is addressed in this section. All of the focus categories were discussed and participants expounded on their perceptions.

Perceptions are always interwoven and linked to all previous experiences as shared by some principals. Surprisingly, principals had mixed beliefs about the high stakes testing and conveyed that principals should be given the latitude to lead based on the needs with their school. In the perceptions of the principals, testing did not measure the effectiveness of student performance. It only provided a snapshot of what children can do. It remains to be seen as to whether or not testing has actually improved the education of all students within public education, and these principals echoed that sentiment.

It was also surprising that the body language shifted as I talked about test results reflecting the principals’ leadership abilities. They appeared a little more reflective and thoughtful in sharing before responding. These participants believed that testing does

reflect upon the leader who is serving the school and those principals should be held accountable. They shared about all the pressure placed upon them as school principals and that everything falls on the school principal's ability to lead effectively. They shared that non-academic factors should be calculated in with test results, including qualitative data.

As indicated in the categories, principals believed that testing should be fair and equitable and they know how critical accountability is within their schools. They expressed that the focus needs to be on the whole child, a growth model is needed, sanctions should not be punitive, and alternative assessments needed to be used.

Principals expressed strong opinions that testing makes them more focused instructional leaders due to the nature of analyzing test data and devising plans based on that data. Again, principals feel the pressure and hold themselves accountable for their schools' test results, but they did share that a principal cannot control all the variables and factors impacting accountability.

Interestingly, all of the principals in this group shared that they do not believe that giving monetary rewards improve student performance. They actually expressed strong opposition about giving monetary rewards to improve student performance due to those contributing factors of the needs of student population they served.

Principals opposed the use of sanctions due to the belief that it cannot be an all of nothing model. They expressed the value of a growth model versus a proficiency model at the national level.

The day-to-day responsibilities these principals carried out appeared to be a little different, but all spent quality time on the teaching within their building and the learning that took place in hopes of impacting test scores.

The greatest sharing occurred in the schools where test scores were good. Overall, participants told similar perceptions about accountability and the difference in how principals were treated differently based on the outcome of test data. The most noticeable of these differences was the level of consequence rendered for principals not meeting accountability expectations. Participants could not understand how the consequences for not meeting those expectations were also much more severe for other school principals. The principals believed that a growth model for measuring student achievement was the best model and that while testing did create more of a focus and some subgroups showed improvements in achievement, it did not capture the essence of learning for all children.

The principals encountered challenges based on how accountability had impacted them in their current role as principal. They described being caught between educating the whole child while still trying to focus on specific content areas that was tested. This challenge manifested itself in all aspects of their personal and professional lives. These principals spoke of adapting their leadership style based on the school they served and based on the mandates of accountability. This created issues with some of their roles and responsibilities. Accountability has placed lots of pressure upon school principals and created challenges and it definitely impacts their role, perspectives, and all other aspects of school leadership.

Principals feel like they have to be data-driven and spend less time developing relationships within their building. At times, even their growth and development were planned by the school system in which they worked and that staff development was district driven. Of course, the decisions they made had to be within a framework set by the district and not a lot of thinking out of the box ideas. There are programs and initiatives that can stifle creativity, all of which they attributed to accountability.

In this era of high stakes testing, some placed little importance on the arts and other non-tested school initiatives and programs. Even parents tended to place little emphasis on test scores and looked to principals to provide their child with a balanced approach experience. Also, principals believed that a large majority of the parents do not truly understand all the data and had more conversations with students about the progress. Many are more lenient about not suspending students so that they are in school learning in hopes of positive impacts. Principals spend lots of time talking with students about the importance of doing well academically.

It is quite common for school principals to discuss accountability and concerns related to accountability with other school principals and educators. Many times they seek advice about how to improve their own school or practices. It is apparent that this is a job that cannot be done alone in this high stakes era of accountability. It is also important for school principals to plan as to how they will address the community and advocate for their school. Principals shared how they created marketing plans in order to counter balance test scores if they were not good. It was quite obvious that the type of school they are lead, determines the way in which they need to market their school.

Effects of Accountability

School principals are critical to improvements in school quality, presumably acting as agents for all stakeholders in their communities. In this section, I specifically focused on how accountability has affected the leadership role. They are faced with many challenges and responsibilities, all of which directly impacts their abilities. Principals have to address a variety of topics such as, their own leadership abilities, professional growth and development, making decisions, school based initiatives that have no direct impact on test results, dealing with parents, students, other educators, and those within their own school community. Furthermore, principals have to create plans to market their school, deal with the day-to-day leadership issues, and deal with accountability challenges as it relates to test results. They have to closely monitor their own social, emotional, and physical well-being due to the stressful nature of the job. Analysis of the data indicated several main focuses which include principals' skills, public relations, challenges faced, and other implications that they encounter.

Furthermore, the data indicated that principals kept abreast of current research in order to make sound decisions about the needs of their students. Many of them used a holistic approach and incorporated best practices into their daily routines in order to improve the quality of their school. Reading was mentioned as the foundational content area of focus and they looked for effective teachers to work within their schools. They spent quality time in the classrooms and used the data to make informed decisions. This impacted their abilities to lead their school more effectively.

In leading, principals shared that they had to rely on others and seek input in order to yield continuous improvement. They spent lots of their time collaborating and advocating for their schools and had many focused conversations. Several principals expressed that one must have great public relations skills and be able to communicate information and share data about their school.

They shared the many challenges and impact of leading. While they faced many challenges such as paperwork, seeking quality in the classrooms, integration of other content areas, student achievement, continuous monitoring, and the huge responsibility of being aware of all aspects of the school including finances, they realized the importance of being knowledgeable about what goes on with the context of the school.

Many of the principals conveyed that other implications such as physical, psychological, health, limitations on time, social opportunities, career decisions, and the stigma that sometimes come with failure had impacted them to some degree.

Leadership Frameworks

The focus question for this section, “What leadership frameworks do school principals most often perceive that are necessary for accountability success?” was addressed. When the principals described the successes they had accomplished four main themes surfaced as indicated in the categories. The first was that the skills of the principals and how they adapted their leadership styles to the kind of school that they were served and that they tapped into the leadership framework that produced the most success. The other categories were the public relations skills, other challenges and implications of how accountability has impacted their role.

Even though the majority of the experiences they described led them to the fact that they had to be a strong instructional leader, they also shared how they spend more time with matters related to instruction. Principals focused on curriculum, assessment, teaching, and learning as a part of this framework and shared that they cannot be successful without being a strong instructional leader.

The respondents shared that instructional leadership is essential to accountability success.

The principals shared that even transformational leadership is important especially when they had to change their school to produce the kind of results they set forth. Many linked the fact that accountability drove them to this framework because of the demands and changes needed to fulfill requirements. While it was important for them to know instruction to transform their schools, it was also important for them to integrate many different stakeholders in all parts of the school by using the integrated approach. These principals believed it must be that it is everyone working together for the greater good of the school and a shared sense of responsibility was needed to ensure success. Moral leadership was the foundation to success as expressed by many principals and that we must have personal and ethical principles

Most of the principals in highly impacted schools believed that instructional and transformational leadership lead them to success and principals in non-highly impacted schools believe that it was a variation or components of all leadership frameworks. Instructional and transformational were the predominant frameworks mentioned.

Finally, school principals felt that instructional leadership was the most important framework that led to accountability success. I came to understand that the principals'

success was directly related to the framework utilized at the given time of need. It seemed that if it had not been for the principal's ability to adjust to the needed framework, success would not have been evident.

Principals Managing Perceptions

The question, "How do leaders manage their perceptions in this age of high stakes accountability to create success?" lead to three main categories with subcategories was discussed. The three categories were: professional prioritization, leadership techniques, and personal coping strategies.

Many principals echoed a sense of a strong focus on the children that they serve, keeping abreast of the latest research, and prioritizing the many responsibilities of their job. Often they talked about how they constantly sought advice and input from colleagues and others in the field of education. Most of them shared that it was important to have some sort of networking system. All of the principals talked about the importance of a team approach and had a strong belief that school principals have many major responsibilities. The daily responsibilities of a school principal are tremendous and impossible to accomplish alone. Principals shared the massive amount of paperwork and meetings that they attended especially the principals serving a highly impacted school.

Several principals shared that the stress is tremendous and the pressure of accountability is demanding, but that they created their own ways of managing by prioritizing and putting things in perspective. Some even mentioned praying and using a team. Others shared that they made sure that the environment was positive, they delegated responsibilities, and tried not to take it home. It was in unity that they agreed

that principals needed to create balance in serving, engage in other outlets to relieve stress, and take care of themselves in whatever way necessary.

Lastly, participants shared that school principals must possess technology skills in order to complete timely responsibilities and keeping abreast was a challenge itself. Principals shared the many on-line resources such as web portals, testing databases, and curriculum resources via the school system provided web site. While they are appreciative of the many technological resources, they expressed concerns about the management of it all and the training needed to keep their skills sharp.

A Rich Source of Knowledge

This study has demonstrated that principals were a meaningful source of information regarding their perceptions of accountability. They should be consulted more often to understand the needs and how to better meet those needs. It was important to ensure that as much data as possible came directly from the principals themselves. They articulated their experiences, opinions, and perceptions regarding accountability, the effects, how they manage, and about their dominant leadership framework. They proved to be insightful about the challenges and hopes involved in leading a school whether impacted or not.

The longer interviews lasted, the more empowered participants became and the more they shared about their shortcomings and hopes for education. At the beginning of the interviews participants shared direct answers and needed to be prompted by my questions to expound on their responses. The longer the duration of the interview lasted their sharing grew longer, their tone shifted and was more honest, and they shared more

personal beliefs. Their comfort level with critiquing the school system in which they worked also grew. In addition, participants needed little prompting by me in the latter stages of interviews. They offered responses before I could ask the questions. I learned that these principals have wanted to share their insights for some time but had never been provided a forum. Many of them had never participated in research or had never been given an opportunity to voice their perspectives. They were elated to share and some even stated that more should be done where principals can share.

In addition to principals being a rich source of data for research on this topic, I was surprised by what principals shared as it related to other issues and concerns within their school system. Who they are and what they have experienced represent a wealth of knowledge and wisdom from which school officials and others can learn. They have learned many lessons from experiences in their assigned school, previous school, and in working with a variety of student populations. These experiences have all contributed to an inspiring appreciation for each journey shared. Their insights are worth more than simply informing us about the research questions in this study. They carry wisdom and direction that inform on many aspects of school leadership and leading in the twenty-first century.

Depth of Sharing

I was struck by the depth of sharing and the revelation of specific names and schools in which the participants shared as it related to their experience. This happened as participants shared experiences of how dramatically different leading was in the absence of all this accountability. The more the principals recounted about their experience, the

more I understood how different their perceptions were based on the label of their school. I learned that as hard as we try to understand, unless one has experienced similar circumstances, one will never fully comprehend the journey of leading in this age of high stakes testing. However, it is important to be mindful that the experiences will help all school principals.

Advice for School Principals

Finally, we can learn from the advice that participants shared in chapter IV included in the subcategories. They advised the following as it relates to the perceptions of accountability, the effects of accountability, the leadership frameworks, and managing perceptions to create success:

Implications of this Research

The findings of this study indicate a multitude of opportunities for other possible research studies in regards to principals' perceptions around these confined topics. While a single case study cannot provide a pervasive basis for overall perceptions of elementary school principals, it does have supporting implications for several perspective audiences. The overall findings of this study support the research reviewed in this study and the study provides powerful strategies for practicing elementary school principals.

As indicated by many of the principals interviewed, a school and the students it serve will be more successful if they are strong instructional leaders who can transform the environment. To truly promote substantive school reform that will have a positive impact, it is imperative that educational leaders begin to analyze their own perceptions about accountability.

During the course of the interviewing process, several participants mentioned the role of the principal and the impact on the success of the school they serve. Future studies could provide valuable insight for other school leaders and principals aspiring to implement an effective framework. This type of research could help future principals avoid some of the failures that sometimes come along with leading a school.

From the vast amount of information shared by principals serving in both highly impacted and non-highly impacted schools, the implication for this research leads to overall focus areas, which included principals' skills, programs for principals, staff development for leadership frameworks, principals' training, and special services needed.

The principals shared a wealth of information about their perceptions of accountability, how it has affected their role, and what leadership framework they operated from to create success. This particular section provides practical suggestions for addressing the issues raised by participants.

Principals' Skills

The responses regarding the perceptions and the effects of accountability must be placed in context with the skill set of the principal serving the school, along with the student population that is being served. While accountability is a must for every school, every student, and every school principal, one must look at where they started from and where they end up with regards to testing. As a principal of a highly impacted school, I would even agree that one must take into consideration whether or not they can serve a highly impacted student population. Also, it is important for school officials to look at the growth part of accountability as opposed to the overall proficiency. School principals

must get to know, as best as they can, the students they serve. School principals cannot adequately respond to the needs of their students without a basic understanding of where they started academically and most of the times the needs are great. Their experiences are filled with issues that directly impact their academics, issues such as basic needs not being met, environmental issues, medical issues not addressed, and other issues that must be confronted and dealt with by school principals. Many times students in highly impacted school have certain behaviors that they display due to all the issues they encounter. Principals must be equipped to address these issues along with providing students with the best possible education. Programs and initiatives should be designed with all this in mind. School principals need to understand the struggles faced by students in highly impacted schools in order to help them overcome obstacles that could hinder their success. As one participant shared, it is essential to align the skill set of the principal to the needs of the school.

Programs for Principals

In terms of how vast the challenges are that principals face when serving a school, the creation of specific leadership programs is advisable. These programs could provide intense training and knowledge to principals and provide information that is unique to the type of school they are serving. It should always be a school principals desire to enhance their skills and look for new ways of leading. Many of the participants mentioned the collaboration with colleagues and sharing of ideas in order to improve their skills. Not only can principals share, but they can engage in professional growth and share best practices and strategies to assist them with their needs. Depending on the needs,

principals could design a program that best suit their needs. These programs could take the form professional learning communities with all the principals or with principals serving similar schools or they could again be creative in the design based on their particular needs. In the context of what is needed, a separate program within a district would also be desirable to assist principals in serving and dealing with all the challenges shared by the participants in my study.

Staff Development for Leadership Framework

School principals in all settings should have extensive training about leadership frameworks. As mentioned by many of the participants, your predominant leadership framework may have to shift based on the kind of school you serve. What works in one setting or particular school may not work in another school. For principals, it would be advantageous to gain a wealth of knowledge about leadership frameworks and create practical strategies that are effective based on the school they have to serve. The principals shared experiences of their own growth and increase in skills once they knew which framework was needed to create success in the school they served. Conversely, those who were not exposed to some of the frameworks, shared experiences of frustration and despair with what they needed to do in order to address the many needs of the school. Some of the participants shared that they were opened to whatever it took to better their skills and more needed to be done in their system about learning from one another, but also learning about leadership. They expressed a desire to engage in some non-district mandate leadership opportunities.

More research is certainly needed in this area. Therefore, the approach implemented by school officials should include an assessment component that identifies principals' strengths and deficiencies so leading can be tailored to meet the needs of the particular school and students being served. Indeed a large study would strengthen the validity and reliability.

Principal Training

There is no secret that a school principal must have particular interest or desire to serve a highly impacted school. Therefore, school officials should seek individuals with particular characteristics suited for this group of students. Based upon the descriptions provided by principals, those who serve highly impacted populations need both professional skills and a personality that is willing to help the school and community they serve, along with all the challenges they face. The principal must be dedicated in serving and able to create structures to address the challenges at the same time.

Special training should consist of cultural sensitivity as well as understanding the specific cultures and backgrounds of the students in the school. Other training could consist of how to staff your school with the needs of your student population, support services, designing programs to meet the students' needs, parental involvement, how to create a public relations plan, accountability so that no child is left behind, and many other initiatives based on the overall needs of the students.

Special Services

The principals interviewed never explicitly stated a need for services to help them cope with the many stresses and challenges they encounter on a daily basis, nor did they

mention any special services such as programs designed to address the impact of school leadership on their social, emotional, or physical well-being. Perhaps, it is something that is needed due to all the sharing about the toil that it takes on school principals. Principals are constantly dealing with other people's issues and never find the time to address their own needs. They are givers and need to have an opportunity to replenish in a professional manner. They are impacted greatly by the factors from the students they serve, to the staff they develop, to the impact of accountability.

School officials should be prepared to offer a level of services to their principals. This could take the form of sessions with district counselors or psychologists or other qualified personnel, or by creating partnerships with agencies in the community. If needed, agencies outside of school could help principals address the needs of the school and assist them in serving.

Future Research

In a few years, it would be relevant to interview the principals who are still serving as school principals, perhaps after the reauthorization on NCLB, to see how their experience evolved. I would like to know more about their perceptions and experiences with different mandates and how the remaining years compared to beginning years with NCLB. I would like to know if they did well with regards to test scores. I would also like to know what the circumstances were that caused them not to do well. It would be worthwhile to know if they were able to navigate the challenges they cited in their responses. If so, I would like to know if they used some of the same strategies or developed a new skill set and if so, what are those skills. I also believe it would be

beneficial to look specifically at highly impacted and non-highly impacted schools to see if similarities in their experience can be found.

Now that President Barack Obama's blueprint for school reform has been implemented and a focus is on recognizing and rewarding growth and closing achievement gaps within schools, it would be interesting to interview the same participants to hear their perceptions. As shared, some of the principals believed in accountability, but wanted changes to occur with NCLB. Now, schools are measured by annual measurable objects and not adequately yearly progress.

A similar study could also be conducted looking at different school systems located within the U.S. It would be beneficial to research the perceptions of principals in urban and rural areas to see if common issues have affected their leadership. I would like to compare the level of services provided to elementary school principals.

All schools and principals are different and it would be great to research principals at different levels. This would enable me to more intimately identify with the challenges, beliefs, perceptions, and successes. The researcher could follow the experience of a new principal and those who have been serving more than three years. Interviews throughout the process in addition to observations in schools would provide a more detailed view into the world of a school principal in an American public school. I do not believe that one would be able to draw conclusion that would be applicable to all principals, however we all would benefit from understanding at greater depths how to lead more effectively and ways to enhance the school leadership.

I would also like to conduct research with principals who left the principalship due to accountability. I would like to know, from their perspective, what caused them to leave the role of school principal. It would be important to hear the perspectives of the principals from their viewpoints. This would assist educational policymakers.

Finally, I would like to conduct research on what school systems are doing to assist principals in dealing with all the topics raised in my study. There are studies that provide a big picture overview of leading in this high era of accountability; however, more depth is needed that probes for specifics of how to be successful at leading.

Why is this Research Significant?

This study is important because it allowed ten principals to share their experience and perceptions. A wealth of research exists about effective school leadership, but a limited amount allows elementary school principals to be the main source of data about their perceptions of accountability. The lack of research from the perspective of elementary principals represents an absence in the literature as it relates to leading in this area of high accountability. This study provided an avenue for the voices of principals to be heard in addition to creating a way for readers to create meaning from the shared perspectives. This is important for principals because they often have to manage and lead effectively in order to produce positive results in a high stakes environment with many mandates and accountability at the local, state, and federal levels. This began when the federal government created NCLB to improve the teaching and learning within schools. It was reinforced throughout the process of states designing their own state level accountability models and principals creating ways to navigate through all this. Principals

spend a large portion of their time on teaching and learning that directly impacts test results. This study provided a place for them to share their perspectives with others and empowered them to be heard. Not only was their voice heard, but the insights give other principals and those shaping education a multitude of accountability issues to think about. This conveys the message that they are valued stakeholders in the educational process and their input is meaningful.

In addition, the literature speaks of the accountability, impacts on education, school leadership, and effective practices for school principals. One assumes from the research that these components are independent of one another. However, this study is significant because principals shared about the interconnectedness of effective schooling and the different aspects of their experience. Through their sharing, one has a greater understanding of their perceptions. Whereas the literature speaks in general terms, participants in this study provided an in depth understanding of the specific perspectives of accountability as well as how that affected their leadership role and their dominant leadership framework based on the needs of the school they were leading. The principals did not simply share their perceptions; they invited the reader to experience them through providing relevant experiences. Therefore, perceptions were not viewed in this study as just a recollection of words but as the reality of specific experiences that occurred in the lives of these principals.

Likewise this research does not simply share about all the possible challenges principals may face. Participants provided detailed insight into their real life experiences of leading as a school principal in their particular school. They did not generalize what

experiences may be like for principals as the literature suggests. Rather, the principals recalled specific perceptions and shared the realities of their challenges as they lead. Their input was detailed and more reliable than a report from one who has not personally experienced serving as an elementary school principal in the twenty-first century. The experiences of the principals connected all of the thoughts that impacted their views assisted the reader in understanding that one cannot compartmentalize these perceptions and effects into separate categories. This is missing from the current literature.

In addition, I believe providing a forum for their perceptions to be heard is a significant step in fostering a greater dialogue between policymakers and school principals. Dialogue should facilitate the creation of strategies and programs that are best suited to meet school leaders' needs. Those responsible for assisting school principals in how to lead more effectively need to create more forums where principals are invited to share their perspectives. To be characterized as meaningful and valued stakeholders in the American schooling system, principals must be invited to share their perspectives, thereby participating in the creation of educational policy and programs relevant to their needs. This study provided such a forum to a group of elementary school principals. They were viewed as a rich source of knowledge and experts regarding their perceptions, whereas school officials not leading a school were viewed as those who needed to know and hear about the views and impact of accountability. This is in opposition to the paradigm that views school officials as the experts on schooling empowering them to make top-down policy decisions regarding what principals need to do to lead effectively

in this century. This study recognizes principals as critical and meaningful stakeholders in that process.

This research is also significant because school systems, nationwide, are experiencing difficulty in meeting the needs of high impacted student populations and using research-based knowledge to guide them in utilizing proven techniques. Some school systems are interpreting principals' lack of leading effectively and enhancing their abilities as a sign of incompetent school principals. However, as I have learned in this study, the poverty level of the students within the school impacts perceptions. It could be that it is caused by a lack of focus on this particular group of schools or principals' inability to understand the multitude of variables impacting achievement. As participants shared, it could also be due to too much emphasis placed on testing. It was important for principals to be able to reflect on their past experiences, examine their current practices, and formulate their perspectives. Of course, all of this impacts the way in which they think and operate as school leaders.

Participants demonstrated that given the right circumstances they can create success and create schools where principals are making an impact without the mandate of so much testing. At an Equity Plus school, progress may be slow at the beginning due to the depth of challenges principals are dealing with. It is extremely critical for school officials to understand the depth and breadth of these challenges.

This particular study is also important because as the number of schools facing challenges increases, so does the accountability level that school principals face related to the No Child Left Behind mandates. Due to the pressure schools face to make AYP and

expected growth, principals will need to identify strategies to help school to be successful in spite of all this accountability. School officials will need to tap into the feedback and perspectives of the principals themselves in order to meet those needs. This study provides salient information for school officials to hear those voices and understand their perspectives.

This research is also important because one of its purposes is to add to the school leadership literature; more specifically how principals can better assist designing the framework of success for other school principals in leading more effectively and create ways to enhance the practice of school principals. The audience for this study includes any school or community officials who have dealings with accountability. This study was designed to examine perceptions and experiences. Participants shared insight based on their experience as a practicing school principal. In addition, based on their first-hand experience, they also advised leaders on what we can be doing to meet their perceived needs. I aimed not only to make a contribution to the literature regarding principals' perceptions, but also to provide an avenue for principals to have voice in the design of laws and policies regarding accountability.

Finally, this research is significant because an important aspect of principals sharing is to assist new principals new to school leadership in order to positively impact schools and give them ways to deal effectively with how to navigate today's high stakes environment. Schools are becoming more and more challenging with the impacts of students' emotional, social, and psychological needs. The principals shared information about how difficult it was for them to manage all the stress of leading and a principal

cannot control all the variables. They believe that the principals' skill set should match the school they are assigned and that the principal should not be penalized for the actions of other people when students do not perform well. Schools officials will learn from the perceptions shared by participants so they can foster including school principals when designing programs and initiatives.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, elementary school principals' perceptions were aligned to some of the research about perceptions of accountability and leadership in an era of high stakes testing. The emerging themes and categories support recent research on the pressure of accountability and impact of leading in today's schools.

Principals are a defining factor for school improvement and their perceptions need to be explored even further in order to make impactful decisions that will positively create changes in education and inspire and support opportunities for continuous growth.

It is my desire that other educational leaders will join in the journey of seeking advice and input from principals who are leading in highly impacted and non-highly impacted schools and create sustainable school improvement.

Each of the principals interviewed shared experience in current school they are leading. In addition, they were all at different points in that process. Some had already served a highly impacted school while other had not. Others had never dealt with the sanctions of accountability and the challenges of different sub-groups. Each of them provided valuable insight into the research questions in this study. Even though their experiences were unique, collectively they serve to inform other school principals and

officials how to improve in leading more effectively and how to enhance the overall practice.

When I began the process of gathering data for this study I did not realize how meaningful my time spent with participants would be. It allowed me to get to know them better in the context of the school they served. Therefore, I better understand them as people and then as leaders. I thought I understood the need to hear their perspectives and I thought I was doing that in my position as the principal of a school for a highly impacted student population. The principals interviewed proved more insightful about leading in the twenty-first century than I had anticipated. The process of this research has impacted me in an unpredictable way. I have learned that although I would step out to hear their perspectives, I was not listening deeply to the messages learned. I have learned that experiences can speak for themselves where a deep listener is available to hear them. In my practitioner role, I was listening and interpreting through my perspectives. I have learned that educators must first take the time to listen to other educators and school principals. Advocates who have listened and understood those stories can be a voice for principals in schools and with policymaker. For those who care about the school leadership, the future of public schools, and how to produce more successful schools, principals can represent and share their perspectives. When important policy and program design decisions are made, this will ensure that the principals input are consider.

One of the most powerful comments stated by a principal leading in this particular district was, “It is unfortunate that accountability has come to this and I hope as colleagues we can work together to help each other.” This provides insight that no matter

what school they lead or where they lead, principals must work together to overcome challenges, create opportunities, and provide the best possible education for all students.

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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR SCHOOL PRINCIPAL PARTICIPANTS

Section 1: Perceptions about Accountability

This part of the study is designed to ask you specific questions about your perception of accountability. Accountability refers to No Child Left Behind (Adequate Yearly Progress) and the State of North Carolina Accountability Model (ABCs of Public Education). In addition, accountability refers to the process by which school districts and states attempt to ensure that schools meet their academic goals.

Please note: This interview will be semi-structured. The questions or prompts below serve as guidelines; the complete set of questions will vary depending on the perceptions and experiences that participants share.

1. Tell me about your beliefs and perceptions of the following:
 - high stakes testing and the notion that they improve academic performance
 - testing--measuring the effectiveness of student performance
 - testing--improves the education of all students
 - your school's test results reflecting your leadership abilities
 - your perceptions about non-related academic factors should be considered with your test results
 - the belief that testing makes you a more focused instructional leader
 - school principals being held accountable for students test results
 - giving monetary rewards to improve student performance
 - sanctions administered when schools do not meet AYP
2. Is there any other information that you would like to share about accountability?

Section 2: Effects of Accountability

This part of the interview is designed to ask you specific questions about how accountability has affected your leadership role. Reflect deeply about how you have produced a change in your leadership role due to accountability.

1. How has accountability impacted your instructional leadership skills?
2. How has accountability impacted your professional development and growth?

3. How has accountability affected your decision making process?
4. How has accountability impacted your focus on the arts or other school focused initiatives that do not have a testing accountability component?
5. How has accountability impacted the way you deal with parents?
6. How has accountability impacted the way you deal with students?
7. How has accountability impacted the way you deal with educators?
8. How has accountability impacted the way you deal with your school community?
9. How has accountability impacted your ability to market your school?
10. How has accountability impacted your day-to-day leadership role?
11. How do you manage the accountability challenges?
12. How has your technological skills been impacted?
13. How has the demands of accountability affected your social, emotional, and physical well-being?
14. Are there other ways in which accountability has impacted your leadership role?

Section 3: Leadership Frameworks and Accountability

This part of the interview is created to ask for your thoughts about leadership frameworks that are necessary for accountability success. The frameworks for this study are: instructional leadership, transformational leadership, integrated leadership, and moral leadership. While all of these frameworks have some direct impact, please convey which one(s) is/are necessary for accountability success based on your experience. Participants will be given a written copy of the frameworks for reference if needed.

Definition of Leadership Frameworks:

Instructional Leadership is actions taken or delegated to others to promote growth in student learning. School principals focus on curriculum, assessment, and the day-to-day instructional delivery.

Transformational Leadership is an approach that is utilized to create valuable and positive change in followers and focuses on the organizational objectives.

Integrated Leadership is a combination of many leadership frameworks that benefit the entire school organization. It rests heavily in the concept of shared leadership throughout the school community.

Moral Leadership is grounded in “universal ethics” that empower others and encourage one to uphold positive characteristics to promote oneself or the organization.

Please respond to the following questions by indicating your perceptions and provide a brief explanation for each response.

In what ways do you perceive that instructional leadership is necessary for accountability success?

1. In what ways do you perceive that transformational leadership is necessary for accountability success?
2. In what ways do you perceive that integrated leadership is necessary for accountability success?
3. In what ways do you perceive that moral leadership is necessary for accountability success?
4. Based on our leadership style, which leadership framework(s) has/have created success at your school?

___Instructional Leadership

___Transformational Leadership

___Integrated Leadership

___Moral Leadership

5. Which leadership framework do you believe is most important to accountability success?

___Instructional Leadership

___Transformational Leadership

___Integrated Leadership

___Moral Leadership

6. What has been your extent of training or exposure to the above leadership frameworks?

APPENDIX B

DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

The demographic information requested below is necessary for the research process. Please be assured that this information and all of your responses are being submitted anonymous and kept strictly confidential. Data will be reported in such a way that identification of individuals or schools will be impossible.

1. Please indicate your gender.

Male___ Female___

2. What is your age?

___<30 ___31-40 ___41-50 ___51-60 ___61-70

3. What is your ethnicity?

___White ___African American ___Other (Specify)

4. What is your educational level?

___Masters degree ___Ed.S. ___Ed.D./Ph.D.

5. How many total years of experience do you have in the field of education?

___1-5 ___6-10 ___11-15 ___16-20 ___21-25 ___26+

6. How many total years of experience do you have as a school principal?

___1-5 ___6-10 ___11-15 ___16-20 ___21-25 ___26+

7. How long have you been a principal at this particular school?

___1-5 ___6-10 ___11-15 ___16-20 ___21-25 ___26+

8. Is your school an Equity Plus or non-Equity Plus school?

___Equity Plus School ___Non-Equity Plus School

9. Is your school a magnet school?

Magnet School Not a Magnet School

10. Is your school a Title 1 school?

Title 1 School Not a Title 1 School

11. What are the demographics of your student population?

White% African American% Hispanic%
 Asian% Indian% Other% (Specify)

12. What is the current status of your school's test results as it relates to AYP/NCLB?

AYP Goals Met AYP Goals Not Met

13. What is the current status of your school's test results as it relates to the state's accountability model (ABCs)?

High Growth Expected Growth Less than Expected

14. Is your school in School Improvement based on No Child Left Behind sanctions?

In School Improvement Not in School Improvement

APPENDIX C

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

CONSENT TO ACT AS A HUMAN PARTICIPANT: LONG FORM

Project Title: A Study of Elementary Principals' Perceptions of Accountability and Leadership in this Era of High Stakes

Principal Investigator: Carl Lashley

Project Director: Essie Mckoy

Participant's Name:

What is the study about?

The purpose of this study is to explore the perceptions of elementary school principals about accountability. In addition, I will ascertain some of the effects of accountability on a school principal's leadership role and what they believe to be some of the prevalent leadership frameworks that lead to school success as it relate to accountability. The results of this study will help school principals gain insights into what they should be doing to lead more effectively.

Why are you asking me?

I am asking you to participate because you are an elementary school principal serving in an Equity Plus or Non-Equity Plus elementary school. You have invaluable knowledge, skills, insights, experience, and perceptions that will assist me in this study.

What will you ask me to do if I agree to be in the study?

If you agree, I will ask you to participate in one to two interviews. The interviews will be approximately one and a half to two hours in length. Also, I will ask you to complete a demographic questionnaire. The questionnaire and interview can be completed in a desirable location selected by you, the participant. This may include your work office, your school, or any other location selected by you.

Is there any audio/video recording?

If you agree, I would like to audiotape the interviews. I will either transcribe the tapes myself or hire someone to transcribe. Whoever is hired will be required to sign a

confidentiality form, and I will request that she or he not share any information she or he hears. Because your voice will be potentially identifiable by anyone who hears the tape, your confidentiality for things you say on the tape cannot be guaranteed although the researcher will try to limit access to the tape as described below.

What are the dangers to me?

There are a few minimal risks in this study. It might be uncomfortable for you to share experiences or perceptions or you might feel embarrassed by some of what you say.

If you have any concerns about your rights or how you are being treated, please contact Eric Allen in the Office of Research and Compliance at UNCG at (336) 256-1482. Questions about this project or benefits or risks associated with being in this study can be answered by Essie Mckoy who may be contacted at (336) 784-8003 (H) or (336) 771-4550 (w) or via email at emckoy@wsfcs.k12.nc.us. In addition, you may contact Carl Lashley, Associate Professor at the University of North Carolina Greensboro, at (336) 334-3745.

Are there any benefits to me for taking part in this research study?

You may benefit from sharing your experiences and perceptions to someone who wants to listen. There are no direct benefits.

Are there any benefits to society as a result of me taking part in this research?

This study seeks to examine the perceptions of elementary school principals' perception of accountability by looking closely at their viewpoints and perspectives, how accountability affects their role, and what leadership frameworks do they perceive as effective in leading in this era of high stakes testing. With a focus on interviews, the researcher hopes to give voice to current school principals through the sharing of their experience. This will be valuable to educators because the current literature seldom examines the perspectives of elementary principals. Although research has listed what school principals are doing in the area of leading, this study sets out to provide school principals with a perspective from the elementary level and how principals can lead successfully and possibly other principals can avoid pitfalls.

Will I get paid for being in the study? Will it cost me anything?

There are no costs to you or payments made for participating in this study.

How will you keep my information confidential?

I will do my best to protect your privacy. I will not tell anyone that you are participating in my study. All the notes I take and anything that I record will be kept in a locked file cabinet in my work office, 125 Nicholson Road, Winston-Salem, NC, for up to three years after the study. All audio recordings will be destroyed after they are transcribed. I will not use your real name or the real name of the school or even the city you live in. All information in this study is strictly confidential unless disclosure is required by law.

What if I want to leave the study?

You have the right to refuse to participate or to withdraw at any time, without penalty. If you do withdraw, it will not affect you in any way. If you choose to withdraw, you may request that any of your data that have not been deidentified will be destroyed.

What about new information/changes in the study?

If significant new information relating to the study becomes available which may relate to your willingness to continue to participate, this information will be provided to you.

Voluntary Consent by Participant:

By signing this consent form you are agreeing that you read, or it has been read to you, and you fully understand the contents of this document and are openly willing consent to take part in this study. All of your questions concerning this study have been answered.

By signing this form, you are agreeing that you are 18 years of age or older and are agreeing to participate, or have the individual specified above as a participant participate, in this study described to you by Essie Mckoy.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX D

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL



THE UNIVERSITY of NORTH CAROLINA
GREENSBORO

OFFICE OF RESEARCH COMPLIANCE
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Federalwide Assurance (FWA) #216

To: Carl Lashley
Ed Ldrship and Cultural Found
342 School of Education Building

From: UNCG IRB

Authorized signature on behalf of IRB

Approval Date: 8/08/2011

Expiration Date of Approval: 8/06/2012

RE: Notice of IRB Approval by Expedited Review (under 45 CFR 46.110)

Submission Type: Initial

Expedited Category: 7.Surveys/interviews/focus groups,6.Voice/image research recordings

Study #: 11-0274**Study Title:** A Study of Elementary Principals' Perceptions of Accountability and Leadership in an Era of High Stakes Testing

This submission has been approved by the IRB for the period indicated. It has been determined that the risk involved in this research is no more than minimal.

Study Description:

The purpose of this project is to analyze the perceptions of elementary school principals about accountability: 1) to look for any similarities and differences in their perceptions; 2) to review data for any specific leadership framework in order to lead effectively; 3) to look for ways in which accountability has affected their role; and 4) to gain insight about how leaders are managing their perceptions in this age of high stakes accountability to create success.

Investigator's Responsibilities

Federal regulations require that all research be reviewed at least annually. It is the Principal Investigator's responsibility to submit for renewal and obtain approval before the expiration date. You may not continue any research activity beyond the expiration date without IRB approval. Failure to receive approval for continuation before the expiration date will result in automatic termination of the approval for this study on the expiration date.

Signed letters, along with stamped copies of consent forms and other recruitment materials will be scanned to you in a separate email. These consent forms must be used unless the IRB has given you approval to waive this requirement.

You are required to obtain IRB approval for any changes to any aspect of this study before they can be implemented (use the modification application available at <http://www.uncg.edu/orc/irb.htm>). Should any adverse event or unanticipated problem involving risks to subjects or others occur it must be reported immediately to the IRB using the "Unanticipated Problem/Event" form at the same website.

CC:Essie McKoy, Chris Farris, (ORED), Non-IRB Review Contact, (ORC), Non-IRB Review Contact