K-4 TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF TEACHER INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP PRACTICES

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K-4 TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF TEACHER INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP PRACTICES

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study sought to examine K-4 teacher perceptions of teacher instructional leadership practices as a result of increased statutory accountability demands in a high-achieving, homogeneous, rural Ohio school. Dodge Local, an Excellent school district as deemed by state of Ohio Local Report Card, was the school district studied. Through interviews, this study sought to examine how teachers currently describe their own instructional practice, how teachers describe their own capacity for instructional leadership, and what factors they perceive as levers for change in their own instructional leadership practice as a result of statutory accountability demands.

Descriptive methods were used to describe the 11 teachers selected for the study from a K-2 and a 3-4 building. A face-to-face in-depth interview with pre-determined questions was utilized with each participant. All interviews were recorded, then transcribed, coded, and analyzed.

Findings included the observation that Dodge Local lacks several foundational elements identified in the literature as effective instructional leadership practices. Dodge Local teachers focused on student needs in the classroom and felt a responsibility toward student achievement and learning. However, a formal improvement plan and vision were absent. Teachers tended to refer to various accountability demands as de facto goals. Finally, teachers in Dodge did not have an enduring understanding of accountability demands that have the potential to lead to meaningful conversations about teaching and
learning. Dodge did not have a broad enough awareness of the demands or any discrete ideas concerning how accountability demands would impact their instructional practices in future years.

Although Dodge is rated excellent, according to the external accountability system, the internal structure and function of the district is in direct contrast. This study adds breadth and depth to the function of the Local Report Card in the State of Ohio and its function in relation to school district excellence.
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Over the course of 10 years, there are many people that I have encountered who have most likely played some role in my completing this dissertation. I am certain that I won’t name them all in this section, but I hope if they ever read this that they know that they contributed in some way whether in thoughts, words, or deed.

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Dedication:

To my angel Ainsley... I know that you played a part in this for me. I love you.

Keep smiling down on us.
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

The school of yesterday is not the school of today. The United States of America has been faced with rising pressures of improving schools over the past several decades. The *A Nation at Risk* report, published in 1983, identified and documented a growing concern about U.S. schools. As a result of the report, the political pressure the report generated, and media coverage of how U.S. schools compared to other nations, reform efforts such as the effective schools movement and site-based management became central to our discussion of schools and schooling in the United States. Following *A Nation at Risk*, in the 1990s, the research literature concerning school improvement shifted focus, and the effect of school principals on student learning and achievement became an additional focus of discussion (Hallinger, 2005).

The past decade has broadened the scope of influence on student learning. In 2001 *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) was passed. In 2010, the Federal Government released a blueprint for revisions to *NCLB*, in order to provide states relief from the one size fits all accountability model. *NCLB*, originally named The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), was specific legislation that emphasized accountability and student achievement. According to this legislation, all students must meet 100% proficiency by the school year 2013-2014. This lofty student proficiency mandate coupled with each school and district needing to meet Adequate Yearly Progress
every year emphasized student achievement as a whole. However, *NCLB* did not provide for the unique improvement needs of each school or district. U.S. Education Secretary Arne Duncan (2009) spoke about the limitations of NCLB, “it unfairly labeled many schools as failures even when they were making real progress—it places too much emphasis on absolute test scores rather than student growth—and it is overly prescriptive in some ways while it is too blunt an instrument of reform in others. But the biggest problem with NCLB is that it doesn't encourage high learning standards”.

Reacting to the limitations in NCLB, as well as the realization that the reauthorization of ESEA was not a reality in the near future, the Federal Government offered states the ability to apply for waivers from provisions in the NCLB legislation. The U.S. Department of Education (2012) believed that this waiver provision would provide states the flexibility of creating reforms to best to meet the instructional needs of students and improve academic achievement. These waivers needed to include college and career-ready standards, teacher and principal evaluation and support systems, new performance targets for student achievement and closing achievement gaps, systems to recognize high-performing schools, systems to assist low performing schools, and improving performance of subgroups (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). Ohio applied for a waiver request and the most recent version was approved in May of 2012. Ohio’s waiver focused on the required components listed above which will raise the stakes for accountability and has the potential to create a great deal of stress concerning accountability for any school personnel (Johnstone, Dikkers, & Luedke, 2009; Lashway, 2002).
Achievement and accountability goals have broadened the scope of work within the school and created a need for additional individuals to assume a role in student learning. The Local Report Card (LRC) annually issued by the Ohio Department of Education reports on individual school district progress to community members. The LRC reports on the achievement test scores of students, the value added for each student (one year’s worth of growth), as well as scores for particular subgroups of students. Although this external accountability piece provides the community a picture of the school district progress, it has the potential to distract attention away from internal programs, polices, and practices related to on-going improvement of instruction. By focusing on increasing demands associated with attaining a “good grade”, administrators begin to focus on how to play the game, as opposed to improving education for all students. Thus, an internal accountability system focused on the day-to-day matters of instruction and student learning has the potential to ensure that the school is focused on school improvement.

This study aimed to examine teacher perceptions of teachers’ instructional leadership within a K-2 and a 3-4 building as a result of increased statutory accountability demands. The new Local Report Card (LRC) measures that will be released within the next three years, as a result of the Ohio ESEA Waiver, will challenge districts’ once excellent scores on the former LRC. The new LRC ratings will focus on ongoing change initiatives, which reflect the internal accountability mechanisms in the district (Poole, 2011). Teacher perceptions of the effects of accountability on teachers’ instructional leadership practice will be examined through this lens.
Background

Historically, instructional leadership has been, where exercised, shared by a variety of personnel with a district. Although superintendents view curriculum and instruction as important, they report that political pressures, school finances, greater accountability through legislation and communications have become their priorities (Bredeson & Kose, 2007). Central office personnel can work directly with principals and teachers to provide a focused message about student achievement, providing additional resources, and securing professional development according to the needs of staff members (Fitzgerald, 1993; Quellmalz, Knapp, & Shields, 1995). Additionally, principals who provide their teachers with resources, instructional support, and feedback on instructional effectiveness are considered effective instructional leaders (Printy & Marks, 2006).

However, teachers continue to be the individuals who most directly affect the achievement of students (Fancera & Bliss, 2011; Helterbran, 2010; Southworth, 2002; Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008). When teachers assume the role of teacher leader, influencing the teaching practices of their peers, they can yield individual and group results in the areas of teacher collaboration, individual development, and organizational improvement (Taylor, Goeke, Klein, Onore, & Geist, 2011).

A qualitative study of 25 teacher leaders from five different schools was conducted by Beachum and Dentith (2004) in a large Midwestern city school district. The purpose of the study was to identify the means by which teachers assumed leadership roles and how school administrators help to foster these new teacher leaders. In each case of teacher leadership, there was evidence of strong teacher teaming where teachers
spent time collaborating on curriculum tasks and student success. Teacher leaders also initiated changes, shared ideas with colleagues and felt that their administrators were open to change. Organizing and advocating for other teachers was also a focus of teacher leader work. Finally, trust and caring for others was a theme among the teacher leaders. A school culture lacking collegial trust can impede change in regard to instructional leadership and student learning (Bryk & Schneider, 2003; Cosner, 2009).

School progress can also be hampered by political influences. Recent accountability legislation (e.g., NCLB, ESEA) created ratings that have been described and shared as part of the Local Report Card for school districts. If a district rating is excellent, schools and districts may be less likely to take innovation as a serious challenge as they may believe their success will continue (Collins, 2009; Hambrick & D’Aveni, 1988; Weitzel & Jonsson, 1989).

Waugh and Punch (1987) reviewed research on system-wide variables that affected teacher receptivity to change. They concluded that there are six variables which could apply to teacher receptivity to change:

- basic attitudes to education, the extent that fears and uncertainties associated with the change are alleviated, practicality of the change in operation, perceived expectations and beliefs about the change in operation, perceived school support for the change in operation, and personal cost appraisal for the change in operation. (Waugh & Punch, 1987, p. 243)

Each of these variables is described in detail in chapter II, as well as provided in an overview in Table 1. However, examining each of these variables in regard to a teacher’s perceptions about the statutory accountability demand changes could assist in answering the research questions about the levers and barriers to change in instructional leadership.
These attitudes toward change could directly impact teachers’ acceptance of and changes to instructional practice as a result of accountability demands.

Table 1

Waugh & Punch (1987) Teacher Receptivity to Change

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher Variable</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Basic Attitude to Education</td>
<td>• Closed climate</td>
<td>Less likely to change if in conflict with basic beliefs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Traditional values rule</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alleviation of Fears and Uncertainties</td>
<td>• More knowledgeable about change</td>
<td>Aid change to occur because positive communication is occurring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>associated with the change</td>
<td>• More meetings and feedback about change</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practicality of the Change in Operation</td>
<td>• Teachers decide if the change fits into their method of teaching</td>
<td>Change will occur if teachers believe it is compatible with their teaching style</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived Expectations and Beliefs Towards</td>
<td>• Teacher perceptions, reactions, and expectations toward a change</td>
<td>Misconceptions and negative views of change can hinder the implementation of change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the Change in Operation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived School Support for the Change</td>
<td>• Accepting environment</td>
<td>Leadership that supports change will result in positive reactions toward change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Teachers need to express feelings about change</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Active support of teachers and principals</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Cost Appraisal of the Change</td>
<td>• Is the amount of effort worth the reward or student effect</td>
<td>Personal costs for a teacher are high (time, effort) and have little incentive, thus change is viewed as negative</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Winkler (2002) conducted interviews with three teachers with nine years of experience and three teachers with less than two years of experience, who taught at five different schools in Virginia. Asking teachers about the implementation of new high stakes testing in the state, she determined that the veteran teachers equated the implementation of teaching to the new high stakes test as a loss of power and a loss of professionalism. The veteran teachers also viewed the high stakes tests as a threat to their
existing educational philosophies. Winkler’s (2002) conclusions regarding veteran teachers supported Waugh and Punch’s (1987) teacher variables relating to conflict with their teaching values and beliefs, as well as not believing that the change was practical.

Winkler (2002) found differing results with the novice teachers. Novice teachers believed that the high stakes testing created opportunities to collaborate with colleagues and have a uniform curriculum to remain organized and focused. The findings from Winkler’s (2002) study of novice teachers also reiterated Waugh and Punch’s (1987) teacher variables. The novice teachers had a positive view of the change, thus implementing it with a positive attitude realizing positive results.

Teachers can be faced with several barriers that impede their implementation of or practice of teacher leadership. Teacher leaders, assuming a peer leadership position, may not have adequate leadership training or knowledge to execute the position well (Firestone & Martinez, 2007; Raffanti, 2008). Along with this, teachers could experience frustration with the hierarchal structure of schools which does not lend itself to collaborating with colleagues or administrators (Angelle & DeHart, 2011; Raffanti, 2008). Furthermore, teachers who lack time to collaborate with other teachers will not see benefits of teacher leadership (Firestone & Martinez, 2007; Thornton, 2010). Finally, when teacher leaders try to communicate to a much larger school population, the message may be lost or communicated incorrectly (Thornton, 2010).

Considering the fact that teachers have the most direct impact on student achievement creates the impetus to emphasize the importance of and implementation of teacher leadership. Katzenmeyer and Moller (2009) proposed a framework for understanding leadership development for teachers. This framework begins with the
teacher examining himself or herself as a leader, then examining their colleagues as leaders, examining their school culture, and finally applying all the data to actual practice within the school setting. Examining teacher leaders from this perspective provides a comprehensive picture of the perspective of the teacher as an instructional leader, the barriers and supports in place for their instructional leadership, and finally, initiating a plan to practice their skills and implement change.

Statement of the Problem

With the pending legislative reauthorization of ESEA, the Ohio Department of Education applied for an ESEA Waiver to the U.S. Department of Education. This waiver required the external accountability measure in Ohio, the Local Report Card, to be reconfigured so it provided a “high-quality, clearly defined accountability system” for Ohio school districts (Ohio Dept. of Ed., 2012, p. 50). The new Local Report Card was released, in part, in August 2013, and rated schools based on A-F letter grades on achievement, growth, and gap closure (Ohio Dept. of Ed., 2012). This new rating system could potentially diminish a once excellent rated school to a grade of a “B” or lower. Thus, school districts that have traditionally been rated as excellent may need to reassess their programs and processes, as the new Local Report Card could uncover some weakness in the system. The Local Report Card measures external accountability.

The Local Report Card (LRC) annually issued by the Ohio Department of Education reports on individual school district progress to community members. The LRC reports on the achievement test scores of students, the growth measures for students and subgroups of students, gap closing, graduation rates, and attendance rates. Although this accountability provides the community a picture of the school district’s progress, it
creates a great deal of stress for schools. However, a school district’s internal accountability efforts directly affect their response to external accountability policies (Poole, 2011).

Knapp and Feldman (2012) explained internal accountability as the responsibility that individuals have for their own performance as professionals; expectations held by staff members, as well as parents and students; and a “set of rules, mechanisms, and incentives for improving and ultimately attaining high levels of performance” (p. 675). The internal accountability measures are essential in a school in order to provide for excellence in external accountability. When the internal accountability mechanisms in a school are cohesive, focused on outcomes, and bear collective responsibility for student learning, the school will perform better than others (Poole, 2011). Additionally, this work cannot be assigned to a single person or department; superintendents, central office personnel, principals, and teachers must share responsibility in the cumulative district focus on instructional leadership, as Fulmer (2006) described this as “everyone’s work” (p. 1).

The increased accountability demands of recent legislation (NCLB, ESEA) have elevated school improvement to a new level. In the current accountability system, classroom teachers “bear the ultimate responsibility for implementing the ideals of reform associated with the standards” (Donnelly & Sadler, 2009, p. 1051). It has been suggested that in order to meet the school improvement and student achievement demands of increased accountability, the responsibility of instructional leadership must be shared across several leaders (Kruse & Louis, 2009; Kurtz, 2009; Printy & Marks, 2006). Shared leadership, such as developing vision, making decisions, and
implementing programs can influence organizational productivity (Firestone & Martinez, 2007; Helterbran, 2010; Kurtz, 2009; Printy & Marks, 2006; Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008). A Pajak and Glickman study (1989) also showed school districts that engaged in a continual dialogue about student achievement demonstrated a significant improvement in student achievement over three years. Increasing the number of individuals involved in decision-making and problem-solving can create a greater pool of ideas and a more coherent message (Kruse & Louis, 2009; Smylie, 2010).

Examining teacher perceptions of teacher instructional leadership practice within a K-2 and a 3-4 building as a result of increased statutory accountability demands can provide the reader some insight as to the perspective of how teachers in one school district perceive instructional leadership has changed as a result of recent accountability legislation.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to examine teacher perceptions of their own instructional leadership within a K-2 and a 3-4 building as a result of increased statutory accountability demands. This descriptive study resulted in a description of the teacher perceptions of changes in their own instructional leadership practice as a result of increased accountability.

For the purpose of this study, instructional leadership is defined as “. . . those sets of leadership practices that involve the planning, evaluation, coordination, and improvement of teaching and learning” (Robinson, 2010, p. 2).

The research questions posed in this study are:

1. How do teachers describe their own instructional leadership practice?
2 How do teachers describe their own capacity for instructional leadership?

3 What factors do teachers perceive as levers for change in their own instructional leadership practice?

Methodology

The methodology for this research study is described in detail in chapter III. Qualitative methods, specifically descriptive study and narrative inquiry, were employed to conduct this research study. Eleven teacher interviews were conducted in one school district. Additional follow-up questions, after the initial interview, may have been asked in order to develop a more robust understanding of subject’s accounts concerning his or her responses.

The researcher conducted a pilot internship study employing seven interviews in the school district. The pilot study focus was to examine the instructional leadership practices in a school district and their application to an intensified leadership model. The interviews were conducted with the following instructional leaders: one superintendent, two building principals, and four teachers. Although there was a cross-section of instructional leaders from the same school district, the data collected did not provide the depth necessary to tell the instructional leadership story in detail. The researcher concluded that the individuals interviewed lacked information regarding instructional leadership, shared practices, and a district vision as it relates to instructional improvement. With these essential elements missing, it was impossible to draw any conclusions about instructional leadership practices in the school district.

In order to identify individuals to interview who were somewhat knowledgeable about the accountability demands in the state of Ohio affecting education, the researcher
presented all Kindergarten through grade 4 teachers, 27 total, in the district with a questionnaire with a few short items to indicate their knowledge about and their awareness of mandates. The sample was then chosen from these questionnaires. Eleven teachers were chosen to be interviewed. The researcher first eliminated teachers who did not desire to be contacted after completing the questionnaire, which included a total of four teachers. Of the remaining 23 teachers, the researcher identified a cross-section of teachers based upon years of experience, highest degree obtained, grade level taught, and teaching assignment.

One hour long interview with each participant was conducted, with additional contact to clarify questions if necessary. Willis (2007) asserted that making meaning is an emergent process in qualitative study. Thus, the opportunity to follow-up with each participant allows the researcher to initially digest the information from the interview and then prepare for any follow-up or probing questions to provide additional clarification or depth of information to provide a comprehensive narrative about instructional leadership. This focus afforded the researcher the ability to understand the teacher perspective more fully, specifically, and completely (Creswell, 2007; Lichtman, 2013; Richards, 2005). Lichtman (2013) reiterated that the “number of individuals you study is not critical; rather, it is the nature of the study and the degree to which you explore complex in-depth phenomena” (p. 22).

Utilizing the same set of predetermined interview topics for each participant assisted in achieving consistency across the interviews. This methodology also assured that the researcher covered the prescribed list of topics in the interviews, as well as remaining focused on the study (Lichtman, 2013; Willis, 2007). This assured reliability
in the use of methods as a researcher. Richards (2005) reiterated that asking participants about the same topics throughout the interview assures that the researcher used a “thorough and consistent method to produce a trustworthy outcome” (p. 192).

In order to tell the story of the participants in rich detail, a descriptive study design was chosen for this research project. The interviews that were conducted with teachers provided the details to carry the narrative (Creswell, 2002). Utilizing a descriptive and narrative approach afforded the researcher the ability to clarify and better understand instructional leadership (Butin, 2010).

The interviews focused on statutory accountability demands and their impact on teacher instructional leadership practices in the school district. The researcher asked the participants (teachers) about accountability and their perceptions of its impact on their own instructional leadership practice. The researcher also asked the participants (teachers) to describe their own capacity for instructional leadership practice. For specific details, research question alignment to interview questions can be located in Appendix C and all interview protocols can be located in Appendix D.

The researcher utilized three initial codes related to the research questions, including instructional leadership practices, instructional leadership barriers, and instructional leadership interactions. Instructional leadership practices refer to any tasks or activities that support, directly or indirectly, teaching and learning. Coding data according to this category provided information to answer the research questions referring to identifying instructional leadership practices and changes as a result of accountability demands. Identifying instructional leadership barriers, or hurdles that impede instructional leadership practice, provided data to begin to answer the research
questions regarding the factors that are perceived as levers for change in instructional leadership practices. Finally, coding instructional leadership interactions, or any instructional leadership practices mentioned which are employed by other individuals in the school district, also assisted in the framing of the shared leadership practices in the school district.

Using these general codes when initially coding the data provided a framework for developing more specific codes which emerged from the responses of participants in interviews (Smagorinsky, 2008). The intent of these general codes was to provide a framework for the data collection, as well as the opportunity for the specific codes to develop from the interviews instead of being identified by the researcher’s own subjectivity ahead of time. The descriptive study and narrative inquiry allowed the researcher to examine the instructional leadership practices in a school district from the perspective of the school district teachers, as well as how their instructional leadership practices may change as a result of the need for increased statutory accountability demands.

**Limitations**

There are limitations associated with qualitative research. The researcher, a current educational administrator responsible for instructional leadership, comes to the table with bias. The researcher has been an educator for 16 years and in a school leadership position for 12 years. Throughout this time in administration, the researcher has interacted with and observed dozens of schools, administrators, and teachers. These interactions and observations have created the following conclusions on behalf of the researcher: the superintendent plays essentially a political and business role for the
district, the principals are only as good as their superintendent’s expectations, and teachers can only assume leadership roles if they are provided leadership that encourages it. Thus, the researcher approached this study with established beliefs on the roles of individuals in a school district, as well as how instructional leadership should function in a school district. The researcher remained open-minded and did not assume how things work in other school districts. The researcher did not study her own school district.

Preparing interview topics prior to meeting with participants and informed by Smagorinsky’s coding techniques (2008) assisted in minimizing bias.

**Definition of Terms**

The following terms used in this study are defined as follows:

1. **Instructional leadership:** “Instructional leadership refers to those sets of leadership practices that involve the planning, evaluation, coordination, and improvement of teaching and learning” (Robinson, 2010, p. 2).

2. **Instructional leadership practices:** Actively involved in practices that include “planning, [evaluating, coordinating, and improving] teaching and learning” (Robinson, 2010, p. 2). For a teacher this means that they are focused on student learning, seek out professional development for themselves, present and facilitate meetings, engage others in vision, develop relationships, work with integrity, and plan and organize (Angelle & DeHart, 2011).

3. **Internal accountability:** Those behaviors and conditions that drive school efforts toward continuous improvement (Poole, 2011). Schools that generate internal accountability share certain characteristics, including consensus on school mission, clear standards for students’ performance, collecting information to inform themselves about
their success, and exert pressure among their peers to meet their goals (Poole, 2011). A school must develop internal accountability measures in its school improvement plan in order to meet the goals established (Mintrop & MacLellan, 2002).

4. Statutory external accountability: A series of accountability-driven reforms which emerged as a result of Federal legislation (i.e., NCLB, ESEA) to make school leaders more accountable for student achievement in their schools (Graczewski, Knudson, & Holzman, 2009; Mangin, 2007; Portin, Alejano, Knapp, Marzolf, & Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy, 2006). This external accountability can be defined as “the pressures, demands, and expectations from and responsibility to state, district, and local legislators and school boards . . . and others outside the organizational unit” (Poole, 2011, p. 262).

5. Teacher leadership: When “teachers intentionally transfer knowledge that influences one’s ability to meet educational objectives” (Rutherford, 2006, p. 62).

**Summary**

This chapter provided the reader an introduction to the literature regarding the instructional leadership practices at various levels of a school district, as well as the increased accountability demands in recent legislation. This study investigated the instructional leadership practices in a school district from the perspective of the classroom teacher as well as how these practices may change as a result of the need for increased internal accountability. With this information the researcher described and reported the perceptions of instructional leadership practices of teachers, their perception of their capacity for instructional leadership practice, and their perception of how their instructional leadership practice is reacting to increased statutory accountability demands.
CHAPTER II

INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

Over the last 30 years, instructional leadership has increased as a focus of attention as the American educational system’s level of quality has been questioned. Instructional leadership found its roots in the effective schools model of the 1980s, influenced by *A Nation at Risk* report, when it was suggested that principal leadership makes a difference in student achievement (Hallinger, 2005, 2011; Portin et al., 2006). Attention to instructional leadership was posited to change principal practice to, in turn, drive school improvement. The effective schools model suggested that school leaders should be “strong, directive leaders who had been successful at turning their schools around,” “culture builders . . . [who] fostered high expectations and standards for students, as well as teachers” and “goal-oriented . . . they were able to define a clear direction for the school and motivate others to join in its achievement” (Hallinger, 2005, pp. 223-224). These leaders exhibited expertise and could often be found working directly with teachers on curriculum and instruction to improve teaching and learning (Hallinger, 2005).

Following the introduction of instructional leadership, the 1990s were characterized as an era of reform where status quo leadership of schools was no longer acceptable and the site-based management movement took shape (Hallinger, 2005; Portin
et al., 2006). In the 2000s, when *No Child Left Behind* legislation was passed, a series of accountability-driven reforms made school leaders more accountable for the student achievement in their schools (Graczewski et al., 2009; Mangin, 2007; Portin et al., 2006). *No Child Left Behind*, as well as other federal legislation, provides statutory external accountability for schools and districts. This external accountability can be defined as “the pressures, demands, and expectations from and responsibility to state, district, and local legislators and school boards . . . and others outside the organizational unit” (Poole, 2011, p. 262).

Even today, with the pending reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in 2013, the focus on raising standards and rewarding success emphasizes student achievement. The roles and responsibilities of leaders are now focused on what is needed to improve student achievement and the school as a whole through professional development opportunities (Fulmer, 2006). School and district improvement, although driven by external accountability demands of legislation, requires an internal accountability system. Internal accountability is a system of “collective behaviors and conditions [that] exist [in order to] direct attention and effort of the internal school community to continuous improvement” (Poole, 2011, p. 262). An effective internal accountability system will “reinforce a school’s organizational capacity to respond effectively to external accountability policies” (Poole, 2011, p. 262). A strong environment within the school (internal accountability), based on the belief to influence student learning associated with knowledge and skills to act on those beliefs, will lead to a successful external accountability system (Abelman & Elmore, 1999). School leadership needs to extend beyond the principal’s office to every member of the
educational community, as school improvement is “everyone’s work” (Fulmer, 2006, p. 110).

School administrators play a critical role in “creating the conditions for improved instruction” and a particular type of leadership is necessary in high performing schools (Burch, 2007, p. 198; Murphy, Elliott, Goldring, & Porter, 2007). Murphy et al. (2007) explained that quality leadership for learning requires leaders to remain focused on teaching and learning. The more that leaders focus their actions on instructional leadership, or learning-centered leadership, where they are planning, coordinating, evaluating and improving teaching and learning, the greater the influence on improving student achievement (Millward & Timperley, 2010; Robinson, 2010). Robinson (2010) contended that policymakers have also realized the link between instructional leadership and student outcomes, as this evidence has informed the development of educational leadership standards in the United States, as well as other countries.

**Accountability**

Accountability includes those actions that a person, school, or district takes to “give an account of their actions to someone in a position of formal authority inside or outside a school” (Abelman & Elmore, 1999, p. 4). Accountability has emerged from the pressures inherent in the federal legislation to improve student performance. The accountability actions enacted by school personnel can be placed on a continuum from formal actions (i.e., policy) to informal actions (i.e., monitoring or communication) (Abelman & Elmore, 1999).

Statutory external accountability refers to the demands and expectations outside the school district (Poole, 2011). In high-stakes accountability, there are serious
consequences for poor performance such as district restructuring, personnel changes, and even district closure or takeover (No Child Left Behind [NCLB], 2003; Poole, 2011).

A school or school district’s internal accountability efforts directly affect their response to external accountability policies (Poole, 2011). These accountability efforts, whether internal or external, are in place to exert pressure on schools and districts to meet their goals. Schools that collectively generate internal accountability share certain characteristics, including consensus on school mission, clear standards for student performance, collect information to inform themselves about their success, and exert pressure among their peers to meet their goals (Poole, 2011). Abelman and Elmore (1999) also emphasized that there must be a consistency and strength of agreement among school personnel on individual beliefs, collective norms, and values. These characteristics reiterate the research that emphasizes schools that are cohesive, focused on outcomes, and bear collective responsibility for student learning perform better than others (Poole, 2011). Much the same as external accountability, internal accountability must delineate a system of consequences as a result of not fulfilling the collective expectations or neglecting personal responsibilities (Abelman & Elmore, 1999).

Poole (2011) conducted a study to examine the relationship between a state’s external accountability system and a school’s internal accountability system. A total of 5,047 schools were examined, including 717 charter schools and 4,330 traditional public schools. The data were drawn from the district-, state-, and teacher-level questionnaires from The National Center for Education Statistics Schools and Staffing Survey. After controlling for school and state influences, Poole (2011) determined that high-stakes
statutory external accountability systems are not robust enough to assist districts in the creation of strong internal accountability systems to guide school improvement efforts.

**What Does Instructional Leadership Really Mean?**

Hoerr (2007) contended that an instructional leader is one who is the “educational visionary, offering direction and expertise to ensure that students learn” (p. 84). Litchfield (1985) described the role of instructional leader as a complex task where the “success or effectiveness is the result of a range of subtle, context-sensitive behaviors” (p. 204). According to Graczewski et al. (2009) and Hallinger (2005), instructional leadership relies on the degree of implementation of the following characteristics: a clear and specific school-wide vision and mission for instructional improvement, a focus on student learning and implementation support, and a positive school culture which includes professional development. Millward and Timperley (2010) added that “it is what instructional leaders know and do that facilitate the learning that occurs for other individuals that is then transformed into learning by their organizations” (p. 141). McEwan (2003) defined the specific dimensions of instructional leadership as the educational aspect of an educator’s role that focuses on the teaching and learning; the symbolic influence of what is important about the school; and the cultural influence that details the values and beliefs of the school are essential for instructional leaders to consider as well. However, Robinson’s (2010) definition of instructional leadership summarized the essential elements well as she stated, “Instructional leadership refers to those sets of leadership practices that involve the planning, evaluation, coordination, and improvement of teaching and learning” (p. 2). No matter the definition, instructional
leadership is tied to specific characteristics with the intent of improving student achievement and progress.

**Characteristics of Instructional Leadership**

McEwan (2003) outlined several characteristics that tend to define leaders. Effective leaders are able to assess a situation and match their leadership style to the needs of that situation. The skill set of the leader affords them the opportunity to influence others to act, as well as adjusting to the complexity of a task to apply leadership that fits the situation. A strong instructional leader also exhibits skills in the areas of time management and coordination. The ability to plan and organize affords the leader time to focus on learning and not become overwhelmed with management tasks. Having a working knowledge of learning theory, as well as effective curriculum and instruction is essential. Without this knowledge, leaders are ill equipped to set an instructional vision, as well as implementing and assessing instructional goals.

Murphy et al. (2007) defined dimensions of behavior that characterize leadership for learning. The development of a vision for learning created through the analysis of data among stakeholders is essential. This vision can then establish appropriate expectations for learning and maintain a clear focus on students (Murphy et al., 2007). Leaders are also highly engaged in the instructional, curricular, and assessment programs in their schools. Knowing that time devoted to teaching and learning and data analysis is essential to reach high expectations for students is a key for strong leadership. Removing obstacles to teaching and creating time for collegiality is critical for quality education. Instructional leaders should model professional learning, as well as foster communities of learning. Murphy et al. (2007) contended that the focus on school improvement, where
dedication to improving and strengthening instructional skills is the norm, can be fostered through a team approach to leading.

The capabilities of the leader, what the leader needs to be able to do to carry out instructional leadership, can also influence the degree that effective instructional leadership is practiced in a school (Robinson, 2010). Robinson (2010) reviewed studies concerning instructional leadership and found that the following capabilities are necessary for leaders to practice effective instructional leadership: leadership content knowledge, ability to solve complex problems, and interpersonal trust. An effective leader needs to understand the criteria that make teaching effective, thus when evaluating and monitoring teachers, the leader can make suggestions to the teacher on how to improve instruction and teacher professional knowledge. When a leader is able to solve a complex problem, he/she is able to identify deeper issues that need remedied as well. A complex problem solver can identify the facts, provide an option, but have an open-mind to consider others’ opinions to arrive at the best possible solution. Robinson (2010) noted that leadership is a social process where leaders advance a group toward their goals. In order to move forward with this process, followers need to establish interpersonal trust with the leader. Thus, interpersonal trust established through interpersonal respect, personal regard, competence, and integrity is a critical leadership capability (Robinson, 2010). The integration of these skills contributes to effective instructional leadership.

Although researchers apply their own characteristics to identify instructional leaders, once examined there are similarities among them. A key to instructional leadership is to hire a leader who has knowledge of curriculum and instruction (McEwan,
An instructional leader must be able to dedicate time to the facets of teaching and learning (McEwan, 2003). In order to move forward with school improvement, a thorough knowledge of how curriculum is designed, instruction is implemented, and assessment is utilized is necessary (Murphy et al., 2007). An instructional leader uses all of these components to assist with the best instructional process, as well as provide adequate, time, and effective feedback to teachers in order to improve (Robinson, 2010).

Instructional leadership involves a considerable amount of work. Research tells us that teachers are the individuals who most directly impact student achievement (Fancera & Bliss, 2011; Helterbran, 2010; Southworth, 2002; Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008). However, considering the magnitude of the task, there could exist the involvement of multiple instructional leaders including those at the teacher level to the highest leadership level in the organization, where the superintendent could be involved in school improvement work. Thus, the following section includes a brief overview of how other instructional leaders in the school district can assist teachers in affecting student achievement.

Superintendent as an Instructional Leader

The original intent of the superintendent position was for the superintendents to oversee classroom instruction to ensure the implementation of the curriculum (Andero, 2000; Bredeson, 1995). However, this position has evolved into one that emphasizes politics (DeYoung, 1986). NCLB and ESEA outline specific mandates, which require superintendents to achieve particular expectations of their boards of education (Alsbury & Whitaker, 2007; Lashway, 2002). Thus, the superintendent must understand the tenets
of NCLB, ESEA, and instructional leadership in order to inform his constituents of the ramifications of the law, as well as pass school levies to provide adequate funding for schools to survive. The most essential role of superintendents, according to Desiato (2010), Bredeson (1995), Cudeiro (2005), Petersen (2002), Dolph and Grant (2010), and Petersen (1999), was maintaining an instructional vision and focus. A clear instructional vision is necessary for improving teaching and learning and provides a picture of the school in the future (Deal & Peterson, 2009; Johnson & Chrispeels, 2010; Lashway, 2002). Finally, superintendents must focus on partnerships with staff and community members in order to encourage and develop positive working and learning environments (Dolph & Grant, 2010; Horng & Loeb, 2010).

**Central Office and Instructional Leadership**

Due to the current nature of the superintendent role being focused on the managerial and fiscal tasks in a school district, very often other central office personnel are delegated to perform the senior instructional leadership role in the district. The central office of today now faces demands to provide leadership roles in instruction and student achievement (Burch 2007; Coburn, Toure, & Yamashita, 2009; Honig, 2008; MacIver & Farley, 2003; McEwan, 2003). These district administrators are responsible for advising staff members about good curriculum and instructional practices (Burch, 2007, p. 204; MacIver & Farley, 2003). In order to accomplish this goal, central office administrators must use data in order to make decisions about curriculum and programming, recruiting and equipping principals and teachers with the tools necessary for improved teaching and learning, and providing any support necessary so good instruction can occur (Coburn et al., 2009; MacIver & Farley, 2003).
Principal as Instructional Leader

The literature describes the impact of the principal as an instructional leader on academic progress (Reitzug, West, & Angel, 2008; Supovitz, Sirinides, & May, 2010). Supovitz et al. (2010) examined the effects of principal leadership on teacher instructional practices and student learning. They surveyed teachers about principal leadership practices, with an 81% response rate, and utilized student achievement data from a mid-sized urban school district in the United States. In this study, 38 elementary and middle schools were examined, which included 11,397 student surveys and 721 teacher surveys. As a result of these surveys, the researchers concluded that principal leadership was a significant and positive predictor of teacher change in instruction. Upon further analysis, “educational leadership influences instructional practice, which changes student performance” (Supovitz et al., 2010, p. 45). Thus, principals who focus on instruction, foster community and trust, and clearly communicate school mission and goals have a greater impact on teacher instructional practice (Supovitz et al., 2010).

Hallinger (2005) proposed three dimensions for the instructional leadership of a principal, which can be put into practice in a school building. The three dimensions of leadership include defining the school mission, managing the instructional program, and promoting a positive school learning climate. Several authors described these factors in further detail by delineating how they can be put into practice (Firestone, 2009; Hoy, 1990; Peterson & Deal, 1998; Supovitz et al., 2010; Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008). The principal can define the school mission by focusing the staff and community on the school’s goals, thus creating school priorities. In order to manage instruction, the principal must be deeply embedded in the instructional program through providing
teachers with resources, coordinating the curriculum and supervision of teachers, as well as monitoring student progress (Graczewski et al., 2009; Hallinger, 2005; Printy & Marks, 2006). When a principal visits classrooms, he or she is also indicating a dedication to the instructional program and a desire to impact improved instruction (Graczewski et al., 2009). These principal behaviors can lead to a positive school learning climate and culture where educators share responsibility for improving their teaching practice and student learning (Firestone, 2009; Hallinger, 2005; Hoy, 1990; Louis, Dretzke & Wahlstrom, 2010; Peterson & Deal, 1998).

**Teacher as Instructional Leader**

The emphasis on teacher leadership has gained momentum over the past few decades. Teacher leaders in the 1970s were established to decentralize school structures and empower teachers to recruit new teachers (Firestone & Martinez, 2007). In the 1980s, educational literature focused on instructional leadership as a primary task of principals (Helterbran, 2010; Kurtz, 2009). Then, in the 1990s, the literature began to focus on the effective schools movement and site-based management. In reality, this equated to schools beginning to include teachers in decision making and learning communities (Firestone & Martinez, 2007; Helterbran, 2010; Kurtz, 2009; Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008). Ross, Adams, Bondy, Dana, Dodman, and Swain (2011) concluded, “teacher leadership enhances teachers’ status, builds their leadership skills, improves and corroborates their professional knowledge, and enhances their motivation and intellectual stimulation” (p. 1213). The teacher is a critical player in the instructional leadership puzzle.
In order for teachers to be considered instructional leaders, teachers must collaborate or find time to meet with their colleagues, be involved in decision making, and become leaders of change in the school where they are modeling instructional strategies and sharing their expertise with others, while maintaining a focus on student learning (Angelle & DeHart, 2011; Firestone & Martinez, 2007; Kurtz, 2009). These instructional leadership duties can be undertaken through various formal roles available to teachers, including mentors, team leaders, department chairs, curriculum developers, staff development providers, grade-level chairs, and various instructional coaching roles (Angelle & DeHart, 2011; Helterbran, 2010; Kurtz, 2009). Teacher leaders need to “extend their influence beyond their individual classrooms” in order to recognize that they can make a difference (Phelps, 2008). Just as essential for teacher leaders are the informal roles they play in implementing the classroom functions of planning and communicating goals and collaboration with others (Angelle & DeHart, 2011).

The most current definitions of teacher leaders are those that look at leadership from the perspective of how it influences practice. Katzenmeyer and Moller (2009) most recently defined a teacher leader as one who “[leads] within and beyond the classroom, identify with and contribute to a community of teacher learners and leaders, and influence others toward improved educational practice” (p. 6). York-Barr and Duke (2004) also mentioned that it is how educators influence other members of the school community to improve teaching and learning. Phelps (2008) also included that teacher leaders are able to articulate their own vision, about teaching and learning, and are able to understand the steps to achieve it. Rutherford (2006) summarized the teacher leadership definition to
state, “when teachers intentionally transfer knowledge that influence’s one’s ability to meet educational objectives” (p. 62).

In order for teachers to execute these roles, they must have credibility with their colleagues. This credibility is established by first being an accomplished teacher and one who is viewed as having expertise in improving students’ educational experiences and outcomes (Angelle & DeHart, 2011) and has demonstrated that they can work collaboratively to impart change (Nolan & Palazzolo, 2011). Teacher leaders have often earned respect and authority from their colleagues because they possess and demonstrate a wide array of knowledge, skills and dispositions (Phelps, 2008; Raffanti, 2008). However, most teachers who take on any of these informal or formal leadership roles do not view themselves as instructional leaders, reserving this term for their district administrators (Angelle & DeHart, 2011).

Teacher leadership is most often executed in the form of actions that involve influencing teaching and learning, rather than focusing on management activities that are often related to building leadership tasks (Angelle, 2007; Angelle & DeHart, 2011). In a school, one may see teacher leaders “visit and observe other teachers, provide demonstrations and feedback to colleagues, attend conferences to redeliver the knowledge to peers, and develop curriculum” although these may vary depending on the specific school situation in which the teacher works (Angelle & DeHart, 2011, p. 144).

Teacher instructional practice has the greatest impact on student achievement (Fancera & Bliss, 2011; Helterbran, 2010; Southworth, 2002; Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008). Teachers, who believe in their ability to teach, or efficacy, are more willing to share their instructional practices with colleagues and take on additional leadership responsibilities
in schools (Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008). The best student learning occurs in schools where principals encourage teachers to lead and stay informed, create leadership roles for teachers, provide opportunity for teachers to continue learning and be trained as leaders, ease time constraints to provide for leadership activities, and create more connection opportunities with other staff members and the community (Angelle & DeHart, 2011; Kurtz, 2009; Printy & Marks, 2006). In order to facilitate these actions, principals should promote a positive school climate where teacher leadership can flourish and teachers feel empowered to share in decision making (Angelle & DeHart, 2011; Firestone & Martinez, 2007; Helterbran, 2010).

Types of Teacher Leaders

Teacher leaders are often first thought of as experienced teachers. However, Nolan and Palazzolo (2011) believed that teacher leadership needed to be examined at all stages of a teacher’s career, including novice teachers. Their study sought to examine what novice teachers believed to be teacher leader opportunities and their role within the teacher leader framework. Nolan and Palazzolo (2011) surveyed 330 teachers with less than three years of teaching experience. The closed ended survey items referred to core curriculum and instruction decision, managerial decisions on spending and hiring, and associated decisions on policies, evaluation, and placement. Three sets of additional open-ended questions were asked of the participants including questions about teacher leadership meaning, responsibility of teachers in regard to teacher leadership, and opportunities for teacher leadership. The results of the Nolan and Palazzolo (2011) study indicated that novice teachers are given less opportunity to participate in school decision
making than they would prefer. New teachers wanted to explore teacher leadership, but found it threatening and confusing.

Angelle and Beaumont (2008) conducted a qualitative study on teacher leadership and concluded that there are five categories of teacher leaders. The first was educational role models who are excellent teachers are focused on children and inspire others. The second category was a decision maker who believed in sharing the leadership with the principal. The visionary teacher leader, or third category, looked toward the future and was a problem solver while listening to the stakeholders. The fourth category was the supra-practitioner or one who went above and beyond taking on tasks because others declined. Finally, the last category was the teacher leader with a specific role on a committee such as a committee chair, team leader, or other related positions.

Raffanti (2008) conducted a qualitative study on teacher leadership in order to determine the contexts in which teacher leadership prevails. The study involved interviews with 10 teachers. Upon data analysis, four themes emerged which proposed teacher leadership is an interpersonal and intrapersonal experience. Teacher leaders exhibited all of the following skills to some degree: fostering relationships, monitoring self, managing perceptions, and engaging visions. Teacher leaders who fostered relationship were “resilient, resourceful and creative in established peer relationships” (Raffanti, 2008, p. 64). This relationship building might be seen as building trust, reducing isolation, and enhanced influence. Raffanti’s teacher leaders also monitored self through their own personal accountability to the school and their peers by acting as an intermediary between colleagues and administrators. They would consistently monitor their relationship with others in order to ensure that their relationship with teaching
colleagues was strong. Finally, the teacher leaders studied were described as goal oriented. They worked with peers to ensure that goals are met, learner’s needs are realized, and professional growth opportunities are pursued.

Harris (2005c) summarized four essential themes inherent with teacher leadership. The creation of collegial norms is essential in building trust among colleagues and working toward school improvement. Secondly, giving teachers opportunities to lead has a positive effect on the school culture and peer relationships within the school. Teachers working as instructional leaders where they are influencing the curriculum, as well as teaching and learning is essential to teacher leadership. Finally, Harris (2005c) touted that teacher leadership is essential in reculturing school relationship dynamics. Harris (2005c) asserted that teacher collaboration assists with organizational change. When teachers develop trust through the collaborative relationships with colleagues, evidence suggests that this will result in a positive influence toward school culture and ultimately lend itself to instructional and organizational improvement (Harris, 2005c).

**Barriers to Teacher Instructional Leadership**

Teachers can face barriers when trying to execute teacher leadership. Teacher leaders may not have adequate training or knowledge for a peer leadership position (Firestone & Martinez, 2007; Raffanti, 2008). The current hierarchal structure in schools can isolate teachers from collaborating with administrators, as well as colleagues (Angelle & DeHart, 2011; Raffanti, 2008). When a teacher is appointed to a department chair position, oftentimes they become separated from their teaching peers. Thus, instead of developing a collegial relationship, as intended, they may become isolated from their colleagues (Bradley-Levine, 2011; Harris, 2005c). This isolation can occur from the
physical space of where peers work, as well as being isolated from peers because department chairs are viewed as quasi-administrative, thus being ‘on the other side’ (Bradley-Levine, 2011; Thornton, 2010). Firestone and Martinez (2007) also pointed out that teacher leaders, working in a monitoring capacity, can also create tension with their peers as they diminish the trust of working alongside them. If this structure is reconfigured to one that allows for collegiality and collaboration and task-oriented approaches, it can better support teacher leadership (Angelle & DeHart, 2011; Bradley-Levine, 2011; Harris, 2005c).

Time can also be a challenge to teacher instructional leadership. Teachers who do not have dedicated time to collaborate with other teachers will not see benefits of teacher leadership (Firestone & Martinez, 2007; Thornton, 2010). Many teachers believe that they already have too many other roles in the school, including meeting the needs of students, completing paperwork and meeting accountability demands, and therefore are unable to also serve in the capacity as a teacher leader (Thornton, 2010).

Communication can be a challenge to effective teacher leadership. If teachers continue to meet within smaller grade level or department teams, communication may be clear among the peer group. However, when trying to convey a message to a much larger school population, the message may be lost or communicated incorrectly (Thornton, 2010).

**Teacher Leadership Administrative Support**

Teacher leadership is found to be most effective when there is the support of school leadership (Angelle & DeHart, 2011). This support can come in the form of principals empowering their teachers, treating teachers with respect, and valuing their
work (Angelle & DeHart, 2011). It has been suggested that principals who engage in collaborative leadership are best equipped to support teacher leaders in schools (Thornton, 2010).

Angelle and DeHart (2011) conducted a study of 672 teachers regarding their perceptions of the extent of teacher leadership in a school. The researchers utilized the Teacher Leadership Inventory (TLI) developed by Angelle and DeHart. The factors measured in this study include Sharing Expertise, Sharing Leadership, Supra-Practioner, and Principal Selection. Sharing expertise relates to the willingness of teachers to share their knowledge with other teachers. Sharing leadership refers to the principal sharing leadership duties and teacher willingness to accept leadership responsibilities. The supra-practitioner measures behaviors that teachers engage in which go beyond the typical scope of teacher work. Finally, principal selection describes principals who create cliques within the school instead of maintaining an open collaborative culture.

The results of the Angelle and DeHart (2011) study were disaggregated according to school level, degree level, and position. The researchers found the elementary teachers were more prone to be supra-practitioners where they come early and stay late for various activities and responsibilities. Elementary teachers also ranked sharing expertise higher than their middle school or high school peers. Teachers with less education also rated themselves higher on supra-practitioner and sharing expertise, which is explained by the researchers as those with higher degrees tend to take on formal leadership roles. Teachers in leadership positions also believed that principals shared leadership better than those not in leadership positions.
The findings from this Angelle and DeHart (2011) study brought to light many factors about teacher leaders. These include the suggestion that administrators must seek out teacher leaders, as teacher leaders may not volunteer. Furthermore, teacher leader views significantly vary depending on the experience, degree, and position of a teacher. In conclusion the research suggests, it is essential for principals to establish good working relationships with teachers where teachers have some power and feel supported.

**Teacher Leader Reaction to Change**

Teachers are ultimately responsible for the implementation of teaching and learning in the classroom, which is intended to be measured as part of the new accountability requirements (Donnelly & Sadler, 2009). Waugh and Punch (1987) identified several factors which determine a teacher’s receptivity to changes much like the accountability measures stipulate. Waugh and Punch (1987) determined that change which is in opposition to a teacher’s basic beliefs, philosophies, or values will not be well received. When teachers were able to discuss and understand the change to a greater degree in order to alleviate their uncertainties, they were more receptive to change. The authors also concluded that change that seems more practical to teachers and seems to fit their existing classroom protocols and methodologies were more supportive of the change. Waugh and Punch (1987) highlighted the fact that teachers were more receptive to change if they perceived the change to be positive even before implementing it. When teachers feel supported by their school leadership and colleagues, change will be more positive. Finally, teachers will examine the cost benefit of the change. If teachers determine that the extra time and effort exerted to implement the change will exceed the benefit from it, they are less likely to support the change.
With the new accountability measures looming, teachers may react in several ways. Teachers may simply teach to the test and minimize student centered instruction (Donnelly & Sadler, 2009). Teachers may encounter additional work, as they are required to document the new standards in lesson plans, curriculum maps, and the like (Donnelly & Sadler, 2009). Additionally, Donnelly & Sadler’s (2009) work suggested that inexperienced teachers tend to view the standards more positively.

Donnelly and Sadler (2009) conducted a qualitative study with 22 science teachers to ascertain their views of standards and accountability and their impact on their curriculum and their schools. After initial analysis of the interview data, the researchers identified six teacher profiles to highlight their perceptions. These profiles included negative views, testing as focus, already doing it, part of cycle, teaching reality and useful tools.

The negative views teachers, five total, expressed negative thoughts about the standards and accountability, as well as indicating that the standards are counterproductive for teachers and students. The testing as focus teachers, three total, were teaching to the test. Teachers who were already doing it, four total, believed that their teaching had not changed as a result of the standards, as their teaching was always good. These teachers also believed that the standards were implemented for teachers who were not doing their job. The part of the cycle teachers, four total, were teachers who have witnessed many initiatives in education over the course of their veteran careers. Due to this, they made few changes to their teaching, as they believed that ‘this too shall pass’. The teaching reality teachers, four total, believed that standards are a necessary part of education. These teachers were relatively new to the teaching profession. The
final category, useful tools teacher, one total, perceived that the standards are essential tools for instructional and could also assist students in preparing for college. These profiles illustrate that there are wide variety of teacher perspectives toward standards and accountability.

Effective teacher instructional leaders can demonstrate new ways of doing things, aspire for the best in themselves, and help others to solve problems (Kurtz, 2009; Taylor, Goeke, Klein, Onore, & Geist, 2011). The importance of these leadership roles is threefold: teachers have a vested interest in change and how it affects student learning; teachers are aware of the community and history in a building affording them to not make the same mistakes twice; also, teachers can implement change immediately in their classrooms, unlike administrators (Kurtz, 2009). Schools must embrace the teacher leadership movement in order for teachers to work collaboratively, ultimately resulting in increased student achievement.

Organizational Leadership Forms Explored

Since there might be various instructional leaders in a school district, the means by which the instructional leadership tasks are employed need to be examined. In today’s system of accountability-driven reforms, student achievement has become the pinnacle goal. In order to accomplish this improvement task, no one person can take all the responsibility for instructional leadership; rather the work needs to be distributed across superintendents, principals, and teachers (Kruse & Louis, 2009; Kurtz, 2009; Printy & Marks, 2006). Distributed leadership is one way of describing leadership shared across multiple individuals. However, shared leadership has also been used to describe this same idea.
There exist differences between distributed and shared leadership. Shared leadership refers to teachers, or others in the school organization, participating in and carrying out tasks (Printy & Marks, 2006; Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008). Distributed leadership elevates the concept of shared leadership to a new level emphasizing interdependency between leaders (Harris, 2005b; Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2004; Spillane & Healey, 2010). This inter-dependency explains that interactions between and among individuals are the only means by which to accomplish a task. Although in theory the terms shared and distributed leadership refers to different definitions, when working in practice, the terms are used interchangeably.

Harris (2005a) indicated that distributed leadership, or leadership displaying a distributed pattern, was posed in psychology books in the 1950s. The 1970s revisited the idea of distributed leadership by assigning a “central role to the relationship between agency and structure” (Harris, 2005a, p. 257). In the 1980s and 1990s, during the effective schools movement, site-based management encouraged schools’ efforts to include teachers in decision making, as well as providing them leadership tasks (Firestone & Martinez, 2007; Kurtz, 2009; Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008). However, when principals provide teachers the power to make decisions, the entire school building must be ready to enact the decisions and the principal, ultimately, is still responsible for the accountability of student achievement (Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008).

Shared leadership between principals and teachers, where teachers have increased their influence over and participation in school decision making can influence organizational productivity (Firestone & Martinez, 2007; Printy & Marks, 2006; Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008). Effective principals see the value in sharing leadership
responsibilities such as developing vision, making decisions, and implementing programs with teachers as essential to their success (Helterbran, 2010; Kurtz, 2009).

**Benefits of Shared Leadership**

Researchers have identified several positive results due to the presence of shared decision making in schools. Schools that have high trust amongst colleagues exhibited more collective decision making (Tschannen-Moran, 2001; Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008), which can also enhance teacher leadership in the school (Angelle & DeHart, 2011). Collective decision making also leads to greater job satisfaction, increased teacher commitment to goal achievement, and increased teacher attendance and decreased teacher burnout (Nolan & Palazzolo, 2011). Professional communities or teacher-to-teacher relationships afford teachers the ability to provide a common focus on student learning and strengthen teachers’ ability to share knowledge to improve instruction, as well as enhance teacher leadership (Angelle & DeHart, 2011; Louis et al., 2010; Murphy et al., 2007; Printy & Marks, 2006; Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008;). Murphy et al. (2007) explained that these communities of practice afford teachers the ability to expand their instructional knowledge and the desire to implement new instructional practices in their classrooms.

Pajak and Glickman (1989) conducted a study of school districts that demonstrated significant improvement in student achievement that was sustained over three years. Of the 187 districts chosen in Georgia for the study, four districts met the criteria to be examined further. Thirty interviews were conducted with superintendents, central office, principals, and teachers. One of the common themes discovered was a continual dialogue about student achievement. This dialogue was visible in various
meetings that planned, implemented, and reviewed curriculum and instruction. Teachers shared ideas with one another and administrators visited teacher classrooms frequently to provide feedback to improve teacher practice. A continual cycle of direct assistance in the form of feedback, discussion, planning, and providing resources was present. In these schools, teachers viewed administrators as “working with them, not on them, to help improve instruction” (Pajak & Glickman, 1989, p. 62).

Distributed leadership can face barriers to being successfully integrated in a school district. First and foremost, the structure of schools as bureaucratic organizations does not lend itself well to distributed leadership (Harris, 2005b; Murphy, Smylie, Mayrowetz, & Louis, 2009). The organizational design of the school can discourage “leadership across role boundaries” (Harris, 2005b; Murphy et al., 2009, p. 185). Even when schools are willing to forego the paradigms that have existed in their organizational structure, they tend to rely on the comfort of the systems that they have known and regress toward them (Murphy et al., 2009). Harris (2005a) also noted that there are hurdles with determining how to distribute leadership and who should distribute leadership. Thus, for distributed leadership to become effective in a school, the school will need to be restructured where the boundaries that exist between positions are minimized, the distributed tasks are well defined, and all individuals affected realize their own role within the system.

Considering the fact that it could be a daunting task to make distributed leadership work effectively in a school district, Kruse and Louis (2009) proposed a variation of distributed leadership, termed intensification of leadership. This leadership model “increases the number of people engaged in leadership roles and the scope of the school’s
work as it relates to student outcomes” (Kruse & Louis, 2009, p. 10). The authors suggested that intensified leadership requires all members of the school community to become active decision makers and bear collective responsibility for problem-solving. These interacting individuals can pool their knowledge and ideas, thus achieving better ideas and school improvement results through a more coherent message, as they are all involved in the process, rather than a few select individuals (Kruse & Louis, 2009; Smylie, 2010).

**School Culture and Trust**

Supovitz et al. (2010) noted that principals are the “central shaper of their schools’ culture” (p. 35). However, in order to change a school’s culture, the principal must form partnerships with the teaching staff and teachers to provide influence inside and outside of the classroom (Kruse & Louis, 2009). Principals also need to focus on building relationships between the community and teachers in order to provide for support from many individuals (Kruse & Louis, 2009). When a principal involves teachers in decision making including creating opportunities for teachers to collaborate, as well as involving teachers on committees, teachers tend to respond positively (Printy & Marks, 2006). The school culture, if focused on continuous improvement in purpose and practice, can bring great rewards to a building (Hallinger, 2005; Louis et al., 2010).

The third version of the Standards for Professional Learning (2011) developed by Learning Forward illustrated that educator effectiveness and student learning can result only when the school culture is committed to continuous improvement. Specifically, the leadership standard establishes that leaders can rise from all areas of the school community where they work collaboratively, hold themselves and others accountable for
quality, and embed professional learning into the school environment to meet the student achievement goals (Learning Forward, 2011). As the focus on school improvement remains a mainstay in education because the demands for accountability are greater than ever, the question that continues to be asked is how to accomplish the reform that is necessary in any one school district.

A theme that emerged from the work of Tschannen-Moran (2001), Kruse and Louis (1995, 2009), as well as in the Standards for Professional Learning (2011) was the trust orientation. The idea of building capacity, or social trust, needed to improve student learning, is essential for change to occur in regards to instructional leadership and ultimately, student learning (Bryk & Schneider, 2003; Cosner, 2009). In particular, schools being social entities, have a unique opportunity to build social resources, or collegial trust, which is necessary for instructional reform to create opportunities for genuine collaboration between colleagues (Bryk & Schneider, 2003; Cosner, 2009).

Trust can be defined as an “expectancy that the words, actions, and promises of another individual, group, or organization can be relied on” (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy (1998, p. 342). Cosner (2009) described trust as essential in school organizations where “regular interactions, coordination, and cooperation between various members of the organization [are necessary] for work to be completed and for organizational goals to be attained” (p. 251). Individuals who feel trust are more honest in their depictions of the accurate and relevant picture of data in a school (Cosner, 2009; Tschannen-Moran, 2001). Once trust is established, school reform and organizational effectiveness can take place more easily as the sense of risk associated with change is reduced (Tschannen-Moran, 2001). Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (1998) went as far to state that trust is the “foundation
of school effectiveness” and “productive relationships build effective schools” (p. 341).
Principals can foster trust development by creating opportunities for teachers to engage in
teacher interaction (Cosner, 2009). Trust can transcend the walls of the school and also
include the trust developed between the school and students, parents, and community
members as key factors in school reform.

**Additional Factors Affecting Instructional Leadership**

Organizational leadership and trust are factors that can facilitate or impede the
integration of instructional leadership in a school district. However, additional factors
have been found that can contribute to the literature base to explain its success or failure
in a school district as well. In today’s society, small towns located in America’s
Heartland to the coastal communities are losing the most talented young people in the
community to bigger cities and greater opportunities (Carr & Kefalas, 2009; Corbett,
2007). For too long, America has been focused on the urban centers and larger cities and
the small towns have been neglected as far as progress (Carr & Kefalas, 2009). Children
grow up in small towns that are also deemed rural because of their location and they feel
the attachment that the adults have to the location, but they feel a desire to leave and flee
because of the lack of things to do (Carr & Kafalas, 2009). Although this is the case,
some youth yearn for the comforts of home and reject higher education in order to stay
close to family and the community that they know so well (Corbett, 2007).

Carr and Kefalas (2009) and Corbett (2007) contended that rural and small town
schooling and living has prepared the best and brightest to leave and those who feel a
deep love for their town stay. Leaving a small town requires a plan from a younger age,
whereas staying just happens (Carr & Kefalas, 2009). Thus, kids who have drive and
desire and seek grand opportunities drain the resources of the town of the schooling they can receive and then leave and never return are termed, “Achievers” (Carr & Kefalas, 2009). However, the kids who will stay in town and won’t contribute anything to make the town a better place are termed, “Stayers” (Carr & Kefalas, 2009). Rural and small schools need to take note of these changes and better prepare students who plan to stay in the community to make it a better place by contributing to the town.

Sipple and Bent (2008) also contended that there are limitations to rural and small schools. However, they do note that a small school can provide a learning environment that is free of the influences and distractions of a larger and more populated setting. This being said, small schools do experience challenges in providing students with improved educational opportunities for the following reasons: bounded curriculum, staffing, and small enrollment (Sipple & Bent, 2008). Small schools cannot offer the breadth of classes that larger districts do because of their limited staff and small enrollment. Teaching staff may not be of the caliber of larger districts due to lower pay scales and more remote locations. Schools may find that fewer parents and students are involved in activities because of the distance and cost to return to school after hours. Additionally, scale economies limit opportunities for students.

These small and rural school factors limit the potential of students and their achievement, as well as impact the community where the school is located. Instructional leadership decisions made in the district can be influenced by these factors and they can impede school improvement because of small town culture and pride. In small towns, the best and newest is not necessarily as important as what we have always done around here.
as tradition is strong and most feel a “ferocious love for their towns” (Carr & Kefalas, 2009, p. x).

**Accountability and Organizational Decline**

The Local Report Card in the state of Ohio has been the accountability measure for school districts for the past decade. The excellent rating that many districts have achieved across the state will be challenged as the new local report card measures are released within the next three years. It is expected that ratings for most districts will decline in this new system due to the inclusion of measures focused more specifically on on-going continuous change initiatives. In the former system it was possible for a district to maintain an excellent rating even while experiencing declining academic outcomes as long as the threshold scores were met. It is expected that within the new more sensitive system organizational decline will be more readily surfaced and reflected within the scoring model.

Organizational decline is the result of an organization’s failure to adapt in response to change (Weitzel & Jonsson, 1989). “Declining organizations are characterized by a wide range of organizational processes that erode organizational effectiveness and undermine member satisfaction and commitment” (Cameron, Kim, & Whetten, 1987, p. 225). Weitzel and Jonsson (1989) further described organizational decline as “organizations enter the state of decline when they fail to anticipate, recognize, avoid, neutralize, or adapt to external or internal pressures that threaten the organization's long-term survival” (p. 94). Organizations often have a period of a peak performance then result in a decline if the organization fails to adapt (Collins, 2009; Kimberly & Miles, 1980; Weitzel & Jonsson, 1989). Collins (2009) discussed the stages of decline of
companies that were successful, or at least appeared to be successful on the outside, whereas the inside of the company told a much different story. In this way, the measure of success (i.e., school rating) may well be reflective of factors other than instructional leadership or continuous improvement orientations (i.e., homogeneity, socio-economic status).

Theorists proposed several rationales for the stages of organizational decline. Collins (2009) summarized the work of many theorists to mold his five stages of decline. Weizel and Jonsson (1989) also referred to five stages of decline, but through a different lens. Finally, Hambrick and D’Aveni (1988) proposed four stages of organizational decline. These theories are described in detail below, as well as summarized in Table 2.

An organization begins to decline without the realization that it is occurring. Collins (2009) described the first stage of decline as hubris born of success where an organization becomes overconfident as a result of its success. This stage can be characterized by a belief that success will continue automatically. This short-sightedness on the part of the administration is a failure to read signs of looming demise as problems are beginning, but rose-colored glasses have distorted their vision (Weitzel & Jonsson, 1989). Weitzel and Jonsson (1989) also referred to this as the blind stage because the organization is blind to identify changes that could affect the survival of the organization. This blind stage can also signal communication problems within the organization, as individuals who are close to the customers would be able to alert the organization to crisis in very early stages (Weitzel & Jonsson, 1989). At this stage, leaders lose their learning orientation and innovation (Cameron et al., 1987). Hambrick and D’Aveni’s
(1988) origins of disadvantage also characterized this stage as the point where weakness begins and there exists a decline in performance and profit.

Collins (2009) referred to the second stage of success as undisciplined pursuit of “more” where an organization becomes greedy and starts drifting away from its core competencies. When an organization experiences success, the second stage of decline can be characterized by pressure for more growth, which places strain on the organization and consistent delivery by the organization. As the organization grows, there could be too few people in the right seats or people leave the organization thus not leaving enough people to execute excellence. There are difficulties in leadership transitions, which may result in poor planning and failure to groom excellent leaders. Hambrick and D’Aveni (1988) referred to this stage as early impairment where profits begin to be marginalized because of poor performance and decisions. A school could mimic this stage if they are not focused on a strategic plan and a core set of goals. If each individual in the district is working on unrelated projects which are not directed toward a focused goal, the work will be in vain. Thus, the organization is not focused on a set of priorities but instead may engage in the next best thing.

Once negative consequences or results are realized, an organization discounts them. Collins (2009) described stage three as “Denial of Risk and Peril,” which means any negative results or feedback is discounted and does not refer to an actual problem with the company. When an organization is in stage three, the organization tends to explain away negative data and amplifies external praise. The leaders set goals which are not based on facts and do not accept responsibility for their failures but point to external factors to affix blame or find a scapegoat for their problems (Cameron et al., 1987).
Weitzel and Jonsson (1989) referred to this stage as the inaction stage where leaders misinterpret data and think that their organization will be around forever. The leaders are discounting the negative data assuming they are temporary and will improve soon. Hambrick and D’Aveni (1988) also suggested that a downward spiral occurs at this stage where organizations are weak, have impaired decision making, try various strategies, and have false encouragement or believe that problems don’t exist.

At the point of peril, an organization is grasping for straws to try and save itself. The fourth stage of decline, “Grasping for Salvation”, occurs when an organization is trying to save itself by any means possible (Collins, 2009). At this point, an organization tries to make big moves from program to program or strategy to strategy with significant inconsistency. People in the organization are reactive and border on panic-stricken behaviors instead of responding to situations by rational and calm means, as they have low morale and lack of confidence in leadership (Cameron et al., 1987; Weitzel & Jonsson, 1989). Weitzel and Jonsson (1989) referred to this stage as the faulty action stage where decisions are made and changes are put in place that do little or nothing to correct the problems. The organization’s resources continue to erode away. In a school district, this stage becomes apparent when leadership introduces new curriculum, new instructional strategies, or new programs, for instance, without making data-based decisions. The rationale is to try something else because what was being used or done is not working even if implemented for only a short period of time. Implementation of anything at this stage in a school is most likely a knee-jerk reaction to a greater problem that needs to be fixed. When there is no other means of salvation, an organization is truly going to dissolve.
The final stage of decline according to Collins (2009) is “Capitulation to Irrelevance or Death.” By the time companies reach stage five, their decline is imminent. The organization is spiraling downward and out of control. They are plagued with more disappointment, more grasping, and more eroding of resources. Weitzel and Jonsson (1989) divided this stage into two components: crisis stage and dissolution stage. If an organization is in the crisis stage where they have dealt with their problems unsuccessfully, they still can survive if they undergo major restructuring (Weitzel & Jonsson, 1989). If the restructuring or reorganization does not occur, the dissolution stage is imminent and irreversible where the organization must close (Weitzel & Jonsson, 1989). The death struggle phase, as termed by Hambrick and D’Aveni (1988) is characterized by extreme behaviors, extreme performance declines, and eventual death of the organization. A school district that has progressed through the other stages of decline without realizing their plight could most definitely end up at this point. According to No Child Left Behind, if a school district continues to not meet its accountability goals and enters district improvement status, the district is subject to sanctions by the state department of education. Once a district has been in district improvement status for three years or more, a corrective action plan must be initiated and could result in restructuring the district, having another district or the state take over the district, or abolishing the district all together (NCLB, 2003).
### Table 2
Organizational Decline Theories

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<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Stage 1:</strong></td>
<td>Hubris Born of Success</td>
<td>Stage 1: Blind</td>
<td>Stage 1: Origins of Disadvantage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Over-confident</td>
<td>• Blind to changes</td>
<td>• Weakness begins</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Slack in performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Stage 2:</strong></td>
<td>Undisciplined Pursuit of More</td>
<td>Stage 2: Inaction</td>
<td>Stage 2: Early Impairment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Greedy</td>
<td>• “This too shall pass”</td>
<td>• Further Slack</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Stage 3:</strong></td>
<td>Denial of Risk/Peril</td>
<td>Stage 3: Faulty Action</td>
<td>Stage 3: Downward Spiral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Negative discounted</td>
<td>• Initiate changes which</td>
<td>• Inaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>do little or nothing</td>
<td>• Impaired decision</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Stage 4:</strong></td>
<td>Grasping for Salvation</td>
<td>Stage 4: Crisis Stage</td>
<td>Stage 4: Death Struggle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Save by any means possible</td>
<td>• Must undergo major</td>
<td>• Extreme strategies</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>reorganization or face</td>
<td>• Death occurs</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>failure</td>
<td></td>
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<td><strong>Stage 5:</strong></td>
<td>Capitulation to Irrelevance or</td>
<td>Stage 5: Dissolution</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Death</td>
<td>• Decline is imminent</td>
<td>• Irreversible</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Must liquidate</td>
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### Summary
The literature review has provided a summary of the research that exists concerning instructional leadership and how it is integrated into the role of the superintendent, central office personnel, principal, and teacher, as well as a summary of leadership distribution and other factors with the potential to affect instructional leadership in a school district. Instructional leadership is best summarized by Robinson (2010) as “those sets of leadership practices that involve the planning, evaluation, coordination, and improvement of teaching and learning” (p. 2). Student learning cannot occur unless instructional leadership is employed effectively and a positive school culture.
is present in a school district. Teachers are the individuals who most directly impact student achievement (Fancera & Bliss, 2011; Helterbran, 2010; Southworth, 2002; Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008). Thus, it is essential to examine the specific teacher leadership role, as well as how the school district is reacting to increased accountability.

There is a great deal of research that has focused on the “what” leaders do in schools (Harris, 2006). However, Harris (2006) and Kruse and Louis (2009) pointed out that there is little research on the processes utilized in school districts, as well as the interactions amongst school leaders to generate school improvement. This means that we know little about the “how of school leadership, i.e., ways in which leadership practices in schools are shared, negotiated and constructed” to improve student achievement (Harris, 2006, p. 38; Harris & Spillane, 2008). Abelmore and Elmore (1999) also mentioned that policymakers should focus on “why” schools act the way they do instead of dictating how they “ought” to act. Thus, we should investigate the “collaborative and shared processes that contribute to organizational knowledge and improvement” (Harris, 2006, p. 38) and the individual beliefs and values of school personnel to determine accountability practices (Abelman & Elmore, 1999). Current accountability demands have even increased the need for instructional leadership practices to be cohesive, focused on outcomes, and for school personnel to bear collective responsibility for student learning in order to prepare students for the increased rigor of the new state standards and assessments (Poole, 2011). A study focusing on the teacher perceptions of teacher instructional leadership within a K-2 and a 3-4 school building as a result of statutory accountability demands will provide the reader a “richer and more substantial understanding of leadership practice” (Harris, 2005b, Where does it take us?, para. 2).
CHAPTER III
METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter reviewed the methodology for this study of instructional leadership. The topics covered in this chapter include the purpose, research questions, rationale for qualitative research, a description of the participants, and the limitations of the study.

Problem

Legislation, such as No Child Left Behind (NCLB) passed in 2001 and the pending reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), forced schools to increase the rigor of instruction so all students are achieving at higher academic levels. It has been established that external accountability results are best accomplished through strong internal accountability systems (Abelman & Elmore, 1999; Knapp & Feldman, 2012). Abelman and Elmore (1999) asserted that many schools have accountability patterns incorporated, explicitly or not, into their daily operations. These accountability patterns can include accountability channels to report behaviors, as well as accountability that is developed based on the educators and stakeholders’ conceptions of accountability. Abelman and Elmore (1999) also asserted that school staff beliefs, routines, and expectations all assist in shaping internal accountability. Thus, any one person’s conception of accountability is a combination of three factors: “individual
conceptions of responsibility, shared expectations among school participants and stakeholders; and internal and external accountability mechanisms” (Abelman & Elmore, 1999, p. 3). Finally, if these external accountability goals are not met, school districts face the ramification of losing portions of their federal funding (Johnstone et al., 2009). Due to increased accountability demands associated with student achievement goals as well as the mandate to meet adequate yearly progress/annual measurable objectives for all student subgroups, it has been suggested that all levels of the educational organization could assume a role in and take responsibility for instructional leadership (Poole, 2011).

However, identifying what underlies successful instructional leadership is problematic. Historically, districts have received ratings based on test score data that may be more a product of demographics than instructional practices or instructional leadership. In fact, deep examination of the instructional leadership responsibilities in a school district may suggest that a school district does not have the essential elements of policies, practices, and procedures to define a clear instructional leadership picture in order to make systemic achievement gains.

The varied definitions of instructional leadership muddy the waters. Graczewski et al. (2009) and Hallinger (2005) identified vision as an essential characteristic of an instructional leader. Millward and Temperley (2010) emphasized it is how a leader facilitates learning that essentially defines their ability to lead. McEwan (2003) described instructional leadership as the part of the job that focuses on teaching and learning. In order to provide a focus for this study, instructional leadership was defined as “… those sets of leadership practices that involve the planning, evaluation, coordination, and improvement of teaching and learning” (Robinson, 2010, p. 2).
As the federal and state accountability demands continue to increase, a school district needs to implement systemic changes in their instructional leadership practices in order to prepare students for increased rigor as defined by new standards and assessment measures. As such, districts that currently enjoy strong ratings may well experience a shift to less positive scores. While the literature is replete with research into consistently poorly performing schools (Housman & Martinez, 2001; Meyers & Murphy, 2007; Murphy, 2010) and schools that in retrospect have been identified as improved (Brady, 2003; Lashway, 2004; Malen & Rice, 2004; Mintrop & Trujillo, 2005), it lacks research into schools formerly considered “excellent” and are now struggling with change agenda.

**Purpose**

In response to the issues described above, the purpose of this study was to examine teacher perceptions of their own instructional leadership within a K-2 and a 3-4 building as a result of increased statutory accountability demands. This descriptive study resulted in a depiction of participant teachers’ perceptions of their own instructional leadership practice as a result of increased accountability. In this study, the researcher also utilized narrative inquiry to provide a rich detailed account of teacher perspectives.

**Research Questions**

The research questions posed in this study are:

1. How do teachers describe their own instructional leadership practice?
2. How do teachers describe their own capacity for instructional leadership?
3. What factors do teachers perceive as levers for change in their own instructional leadership practice?
Qualitative Research

Qualitative research does not have a discrete and definitive definition. Rather, many researchers and authors believe that qualitative research is an “umbrella term for a wide variety of approaches to and methods for the study of natural social life” (Saldana, 2011, p. 3). Lichtman (2013) described qualitative research, as relying “on verbal and visual communication to answer questions” as well as being research that is interpretive, can be narrow or broad in scope, and is inductive (p. 4). Merriam (1998) summarized the inductive use of qualitative research methods as “focused on discovery, insight, and understanding from the perspectives of those being studied offer[ing] the greatest promise of making significant contributions to the knowledge base and practice of education” (p. 3). Barbour (2008) described qualitative research as an iterative, rather than a linear process.

Qualitative research grew out of the social sciences (Silverman, 2010). These qualitative researchers believed that they could “provide a deeper understanding of social phenomena” using qualitative methods, rather than strictly using quantitative data (Silverman, 2010, p. 8). Using qualitative methods affords the researcher the opportunity to “unpick the mechanisms which link particular variables, by looking at the explanations, or accounts, provided by those involved” (Barbour, 2008, p. 11). Qualitative research utilizes an inductive approach, moving from the specific to the general.

Qualitative research affords researchers the ability to gather data in a natural setting, (i.e., a school, a classroom, a school district; Toloie-Eshlaghy, Chitsaz, Karimian, & Charkhchi, 2011). Qualitative researchers seek to understand phenomena from the
viewpoint of those who are studied (Toloie-Eshlaghy et al., 2011; Toomela, 2011). The researcher gathers data by listening to what people have to say, observing people or situations, and examining documents in order to provide information and to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomena being studied (Silverman, 2010). Corbin and Strauss (2008) added that qualitative research allows the researcher to “get at the inner experiences of the participants,” as well as examine the situation through their perspective, in order to help the researcher construct meaning (p. 14). The researcher is not measuring or counting; instead the researcher constructs the knowledge from the data collected, using his or her own subjective stance which is influenced by life experiences, knowledge, values, beliefs, etc. (Lichtman, 2013; Saldana, 2011). Merriam (1998) added that in qualitative research, reality is ever-changing and multi-dimensional. Qualitative research provides the researcher a truth that is limited to the understanding of the phenomena being studied at one point in time.

There are two reasons for choosing qualitative over a quantitative design. The first reason is that qualitative research affords the researcher the ability to construct knowledge, using an inductive approach (Saldana, 2011). The researcher constructs the picture of reality as the subjects tell their stories. The second reason is that qualitative research allows for the flexibility of “how” and “why” questions. In a quantitative study, the participant could answer survey questions, but the reasoning behind their choices on the survey would go unanswered. A qualitative approach affords the researcher the option to ask follow-up or probing questions to better understand how something came about or why it is important through the interaction with participants (Toloie-Eshlaghy et al., 2011).
The researcher interaction with the participants can provide the study with rich detail. However, the detail can be lost if not presented in an adequate format in the final product. The researcher has considered this and has chosen to utilize descriptive study and narrative inquiry throughout this qualitative research study.

**Descriptive Study**

Descriptive study provided the researcher an opportunity to utilize thick description to convey a story. Creswell (2002) provided additional details about this approach stating, “a descriptive model is when the author relies on detailed descriptions of people and places to carry the narrative” (p. 296). Butin (2010) described a descriptive approach as one that “focuses on clarifying and better understanding an educational issue” (p. 53). This storytelling or narrative approach can provide a realistic picture of the specific attitudes, viewpoints, and explanations as they related to specific individuals involved in the study (Creswell, 2007; Saldana, 2009; Willis, 2007; Witherall & Noddings, 1991). A descriptive study can afford the researcher the ability to tell the story of the participants, in rich detail, as it occurred daily. This descriptive account can provide the reader detail about the story; however, the addition of participant quotes using narrative inquiry will provide the reader a richer perspective from the first person.

**Narrative Inquiry**

Narrative inquiry provided the researcher the opportunity to tell the experiences as expressed by the participants in their lived accounts, or personal storytelling (Creswell, 2007; Lichtman, 2013). The researcher listened to the stories told by the participants and recounted and interwove individual details as necessary to configure a complete picture.
(Creswell, 2007). Lichtman (2013) explained that it is essential that the researcher gather sufficient information from the participants, as potentially all stories are of importance. As the story is told, the researcher adds commentary to make meaning of or interpret the story told (Lichtman, 2013; Willis, 2007). A tremendous advantage of narrative inquiry is telling the whole story of the participant rather than reducing the story into a few themes from coding (Lichtman, 2013). Thus, the researcher is better able to capture what the participant is truly thinking and feeling and portray it as realistically as possible (Lichtman, 2013). A narrative inquiry approach helps to better understand and interpret the perspectives of the participants in the setting being studied (Willis, 2007).

In order to obtain the narrative data from the participants, the researcher interviewed the participants. The data collected from the interviews were then transcribed and coded, using the codebook in Appendix F. The researcher analyzed the data once the data were coded. The researcher sorted the data so the participants’ stories shared were aligned with the research questions. The researcher then correlated the literature, the research questions, and the participant responses in order to develop a clear presentation of the data. Finally, the researcher interwove the participants’ stories into the data collected in order to provide a thorough and complete presentation of their perceptions of instructional leadership.

**Research Design**

Toomela (2011) stated that the research questions must drive the methodology selected for a study. The research questions posed necessitated a qualitative approach because they required descriptive and narrative inquiry, which could not be acquired through quantitative data collection.
In this qualitative research study, the researcher was striving to capture the perceptions of teachers’ instructional leadership practices identified by 11 teachers in a K-2 and a 3-4 school building.

**Sampling**

Purposeful sampling was used to select the school district. The researcher was interested in selecting a school district that had experienced a great deal of academic success, as identified by the Ohio Local Report Card. Also, focusing on a rural school district limited the number of teachers and buildings for the study. It was hoped that by focusing on a small district a greater percentage of the staff population would be interviewed in order to substantiate the data and stories told by individuals. Thus, the school district used in the sample was chosen using a purposeful sampling technique based on the following criteria:

1. Dodge Local School District was identified as Excellent on the Ohio Department of Education 2011-2012 Local Report Card.
2. Dodge Local School district was considered a rural school district, by the Ohio Department of Education and had an average daily membership of approximately 1,000 students.
3. The administrative size of the district was three administrators including a superintendent, high school principal, and one principal who oversees the primary school, intermediate school, and middle school.
4. The location of the school district was a convenient driving distance from home and work to access the participants for interviews.
In order to choose Dodge Local Schools, the researcher consulted with a knowledgeable superintendent in the rural area of northeast Ohio. This individual provided several suggestions for districts that met the set criteria. This district was chosen purposefully from the suggested districts posed by the superintendent due to its location for researcher access.

**District Overview**

Dodge Local School District is located in a rural county in northeast Ohio. This district serves approximately 1,000 students in four school buildings: Dodge High School, Dodge Middle School, Dodge Intermediate School, and Divide Elementary School. The elementary schools are grade-divided schools, as the Dodge Local School District territory encompasses Dodge and Divide townships. Divide Elementary houses grades K-2, Dodge Intermediate houses grades 3-4, Dodge Middle School houses grades 5-8, and Dodge High School houses grades 9-12. Upon issuance of the 2011-2012 Local Report Card, the district maintained the rating of Excellent by the state of Ohio for 11 consecutive years. The percentage of students passing tests has remained consistent with student scores in the high 80s to low 90s. The student population in this district, like many rural districts is not diverse as 96% of students are classified as white/Caucasian. Of the district students, only 15% are economically disadvantaged, and 7% are students with disabilities, where the state averages are 36% and 14%, respectively.

**Participants**

In order to obtain interview participants and utilize the Dodge Local School District in this study, the researcher proceeded through several steps. Initially, the
superintendent of the school district was contacted via phone, the study was explained, and verbal permission was obtained to conduct the study. The researcher then emailed the superintendent the informed consent document (Appendix E) with further information about the study. Then, the K-4 building principal was emailed in order to arrange a time to meet with her staff members to complete the initial questionnaire (Appendix A).

The researcher administered a brief demographic and accountability knowledge questionnaire to all Kindergarten through grade 4 teachers in the Dodge Local School District at a staff meeting. The questionnaire can be found in Appendix A. A total of 27 teachers completed and returned the questionnaire. The data from the questionnaire were compiled and organized into a spreadsheet located in Appendix B. Utilizing the data gathered from the questionnaires, the researcher selected the 11 teachers, 40% of the total teachers, to interview. The researcher first eliminated teachers who did not desire to be contacted after completing the questionnaire, which included four total teachers. Of the remaining 23 teachers, the researcher identified a cross-section of teachers based upon years of experience, highest degree obtained, grade level taught, and teaching assignment. The 11 teachers selected to be interviewed and their characteristics are located in Table 3 below.
Table 3

Teachers Selected for Interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Years of Teaching Experience</th>
<th>Highest Degree</th>
<th>Grade Level Taught</th>
<th>Teaching Assignment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant 1</td>
<td>Wendy Mason</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Master’s</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>General Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 2</td>
<td>Rose Burns</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Bachelor’s</td>
<td>K</td>
<td>General Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 4</td>
<td>Allie Reckler</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Master’s</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>General Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 9</td>
<td>Grace Small</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Bachelor’s</td>
<td>K-3</td>
<td>Title I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 10</td>
<td>Georgia Kelly</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Master’s</td>
<td>K-2</td>
<td>Title I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 11</td>
<td>Melissa Rollins</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Bachelor’s</td>
<td>K</td>
<td>Title I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 15</td>
<td>Heidi Seller</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Bachelor’s</td>
<td>Kindergarten</td>
<td>General Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 22</td>
<td>Heather Dean</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Master’s</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>General Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 25</td>
<td>Barbara Smith</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Master’s</td>
<td>3 &amp; 4</td>
<td>Special Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 26</td>
<td>Megan Kaple</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Master’s</td>
<td>Kindergarten</td>
<td>General Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 27</td>
<td>Susan Miller</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Bachelor’s</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Title I</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Eleven teachers were interviewed for the study. Their years of teaching experience ranged from one teacher who just completed her first full year of teaching to a teacher who completed her 30th year of teaching. All of the teachers had at least a Bachelor’s degree and most had a Master’s degree with some additional graduate hours. The 11 teachers taught in kindergarten through grade four in the areas of special education, Title I, and general education.
Procedures

This descriptive study intended to describe the teacher perceptions, through interviews, of teacher instructional leadership in the Dodge Local School District. Their experiences in the classroom, as educators, provided them a perspective in relation to their role in regards to instructional leadership in an Excellent school district and how it might be affected by statutory accountability demands.

Thus, the questions posed to the participants and data collected in this study focused on identifying the individual perceptions of how instructional leadership practices, instructional leadership capacity characteristics, and instructional leadership levers for change as a results of accountability demands. The data were compiled to examine how the instructional leadership practices in the classroom in a school district consistently achieving Excellent ratings on the Local Report Card might be influenced as a result of increased statutory accountability demands.

Interview Procedures

The researcher conducted face-to-face interviews with each of the 11 teachers in one school district about their perceptions of teacher instructional leadership practice as a result of increased statutory accountability demands. Choosing individuals to interview from multiple years of experience, degree levels, grade levels, and classroom assignments provided a stratification of teacher perspective, or perspective from individuals at various points in their career, experience teaching, and education on which to start collecting data. These individuals, in turn, each provided a unique perspective to the teacher instructional leadership function in their school district and how it is affected as a result of accountability demands.
A one-on-one in-depth interview format was utilized. The purpose of an in-depth interview is to “hear what the participant has to say in his or her own words, in his or her own voice, with his or her own language and narrative” (Lichtman, 2013). Although a list of identical topics was utilized for each participant, the conversation that ensued between the researcher and participant allowed the respondent to contribute as much information as possible. Utilizing a predetermined list of questions for the interviews provided the assurance that there was reliability in the use of methods as a researcher and ensured that all questions were asked during the course of the interview (Lichtman, 2013). The interview protocol can be found in Appendix D. Asking participants several different but aligned questions throughout the interviews reiterated that the researcher used a “thorough and consistent method to produce a trustworthy outcome” (Richards, 2005, p. 192) thus increasing the trustworthiness of the final data and analysis of those data.

The researcher met 10 participants in a school district location, and one participant at a library in another city, to conduct the interviews. The researcher interviewed each participant, with the interview lasting a maximum of one hour. The researcher was cognizant and respectful of limits of teacher time and ended each interview promptly within the one-hour window.

The interview questions were developed in order to align with the three research questions. Therefore, the first several interview questions probed the participant to identify her instructional leadership practices. The middle set of interview questions asked the teacher to identify characteristics that establish or indicate her instructional leadership capacity. Finally, the last few interview questions inquired about possible
levers for change in instructional leadership practice as a result of accountability demands. In order to view all of the interview questions, the complete research question alignment to interview questions can be located in Appendix C, and the interview protocol can be located in Appendix D.

During each interview follow-up or probing questions were asked for additional clarification or to gain a deeper understanding of the answer. An example of a probing question would include, “Can you provide me an example of . . .” or “Can you describe . . .” All probes can be examined more thoroughly in the interview protocol in Appendix D. Richards (2005) described this as focus, or obtaining the data or depth necessary to make the “picture” clear. All interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed for analysis.

After the interview, the researcher recorded any thoughts, insights, observations, or reactions as a result of the interview with the participant, as these provided the researcher a means to capture the situation and recall it at a later time (Lichtman, 2013; Richards, 2005). One of the notes of the researcher that was utilized was that of the interview participant, Allie Reckler. The researcher noted that although Allie was a willing participant and pleasant throughout the process of the interview, she appeared angry and frustrated throughout her interview process. As the results of the data are analyzed in chapter IV, her frustration was apparent throughout her responses. The researcher noted this participant demeanor due to the fact that it was so unlike all of the other teachers who were interviewed.
Interviews

Interviews were chosen as a data collection method because they can provide the researcher in-depth information about a participant’s experiences and viewpoints in an effective and controlled manner (Butin, 2010). The researcher needs to ensure that the questions are clearly written from a neutral stance to ensure that the respondent is not led toward an answer (Butin, 2010); also choosing open-ended, rather than closed-ended questions will assist in this same way (Smith, 1995). Smith (1995) encouraged the researcher to begin with more general questions and then led to more specific questions as the interview progresses and the participant becomes more confident throughout the process. It is anticipated that questions are written to elicit deep and meaningful answers concerning the respondents’ feelings and experiences in order for the researcher to acquire thick data that can be analyzed (Butin, 2010). Research shows that question wording can influence the outcome. Realizing this, the researcher purposely chose to use the words “what is your perception of . . .” in most of the interview questions used in this study. The use of this phrase to begin each question would hope to make the participant feel at ease in the fact that they would not be judged in their answer.

Lichtman (2013) reminded the researcher that he or she is a filter through which all information gathered in an interview passes. If the researcher has background knowledge about the topic, it is essential that the research questions are well-written and thorough to elicit answers from the respondent, instead of the researcher assuming what the respondent means. The researcher is an educator and entered the study with her own views about instructional leadership. However, these views were explored as a component of the literature review and incorporated as their analysis seemed to make
them fit. The current research questions were all written so they were open-ended in order to gather the best data from the participants and not the researcher’s views (Smith, 1995). Furthermore, if additional information was needed on any question, the probes were pre-written on the interview protocol (Appendix D), or the researcher merely asked the participant to explain the idea further. Throughout the study, the researcher was diligent about adhering to the interview protocol in order to obtain responses from the participants that were not tainted with the researcher’s viewpoints, prejudices, or assumptions. Ensuring that the teacher had a positive experience while participating in the interview process, the researcher presented good listening skills maintaining eye contact and an open posture and provided encouragement to the teacher in the form of head nods and verbal reassurances.

Data Analysis

Immediately following the interview, the researcher then transcribed the interview in a timely fashion to ensure consistency with the actual interview and to examine data and its application to the research questions. All interviews were fully transcribed; thus each interview was written and recorded word for word in text. This full transcription ensured that the researcher has a full account of the meaning of the participant’s responses in order to provide a more thorough analysis, whereas a summary transcript might only provide an overview of their interview instead of the verbatim account (Richards, 2005). The researcher transcribed all interviews herself as much is to be gained by re-listening to the interviewing, the voices, and information that might have been forgotten (Richards, 2005). All data files were securely stored on the laptop of the researcher and backed-up on a memory stick, which was carried with the researcher on a
daily basis. Data files were coded with pseudonyms of participants, so personally identifiable information could not be traced back to the participants.

Data analysis was conducted immediately following the interview. The data collected through the process were transcribed and coded according to the following three initial topical and analytic codes identified during the research process: instructional leadership practices, instructional leadership capacity, and instructional leadership demands. Analytic codes are used as they reflect on the meaning and interpretation of the text, as opposed to merely labeling the data because it is topical (Richards, 2005). Utilizing these three general codes to begin analyzing the data provided a framework for the more specific codes that emerged from the thinking of the participants involved in the research (Smagorinsky, 2008).

These initial codes are aligned with the research presented in the literature review. As the researcher revisited and reread the data, the existing codes were refined as the initial codes were too broad (Richards, 2005). Presenting more general codes initially eliminated the researcher subjectivity that could exist where a researcher bottlenecks all of the participants’ responses into predetermined coding categories (Smagorinsky, 2008). In order to ensure coding consistency, the researcher read and reread the data and codes.

When the researcher reviewed the coded data, it was essential that she reflected on whether any data did not seem to belong in any one coded category. If this was the case, the researcher assessed the context of the passage and recoded the data to ensure consistency (Richards, 2005). For instance, one of the initial codes was ‘instructional leadership practices-beliefs’ (ILPB). However, after coding all of the data with that code (ILPB), it appeared to the researcher that the code (ILPB) was overused and could be
further broken down into two more detailed codes to better describe the data. So, all of
the data coded (ILPB) were reread and recoded to either “instructional leadership
practices-beliefs curriculum” (ILPBC) or “instructional leadership practices-beliefs
tenure” (ILPBT). After recoding the data using these two codes, a much clearer picture
of a pattern with curriculum beliefs and beliefs regarding tenure practices appeared to the
researcher. Thus, the reflecting and recoding process was essential to better understand
the data.

There were several themes emerging from the literature review that were initially
applied to code the data. Instructional leadership practice was central to this study and
was central to the codebook. Listening for data that assisted in identifying instructional
leadership practices was critical. Instructional leadership practices refer to any tasks or
activities that support, directly or indirectly, teaching and learning. In order to determine
how teachers describe their own instructional leadership practice, the researcher coded
instructional leadership capacity. Identifying the unique characteristics, which
instructional leaders must possess and how they relate to the ability to exert instructional
leadership can be essential in determining who is an instructional leader in any school.
Finally, examining the demands that accountability has placed upon educators and how
that affects instructional practice can lend clarification to the levers for change in
instructional leadership practice. The literature also provided several examples of how
teachers’ reactions to change can assist in identifying their capacity for instructional
leadership.
After the initial codes were applied to the data, additional codes and sub-codes were developed from the transcripts of participants’ responses. As the researcher reviewed the coded data, it was sorted to find similarities, differences, and uniqueness. As described previously, these codes and sub-codes were created based on commonalities inherent in the data and enabled the researcher to organize and analyze the data to greater depth (Smagorinsky, 2008). The complete codebook can be located in Appendix F. The data analysis chapter and conclusion chapter of this research study describe the emerged themes and supporting information in detail.

The researcher then reviewed all transcribed data, reviewed codes, re-coded as necessary, and sorted the data into categories according to the research questions. As the researcher reviewed the collected, sorted, and categorized data, she began to develop the story behind instructional leadership in the school district. Finally, the researcher presented the data collected utilizing descriptive summaries. Data gathered from participants were presented in short summaries by the researcher, as well as direct quotations or stories as told by the participants.

**Limitations**

It was essential for the researcher to remain cognizant of the ethical issues throughout the research process and to continually examine his/her own ethical approach throughout the study (Merriam, 1998). The researcher conducting this studying has been and educator for 16 years, with three of those as a teacher and 13 as an administrator. Approaching this study from the perspective of a practicing administrator is accompanied by established beliefs of how instructional leadership should function in a school district for maximum efficiency and effectiveness. The researcher utilized Smagorinky’s coding
techniques (2008) and predetermined topics (Lichtman, 2013) in interviews to assist in minimizing bias in the study.

Although descriptive study was utilized because of the rich and deep meanings that it can provide, if the researcher does not invest the time to devote to such an undertaking, meaning may be unclear and vague. In direct contrast, if the research is too verbose providing very lengthy descriptions and details, meaning can also be lost. Lincoln and Guba (1985) described the thick, rich description that a qualitative study can provide. The detail inherent in this description can assist the reader in determining whether the findings can be applied to other situations. The researcher aimed to provide thick, rich description in which the reader can find application to other like school districts.

Summary

This chapter presented the purpose of the research study, the research questions, qualitative rationale, the design of the study, and the limitations of the study. The application of these entities was utilized to examine teacher perceptions of teacher instructional leadership within a K-4 building as a result of increased statutory accountability demands.
CHAPTER IV
RESULTS

The purpose of this descriptive study was to examine teacher perceptions of their own instructional leadership within a K-2 and a 3-4 building as a result of increased statutory accountability demands. Specifically, this study addressed the following research questions:

1. How do teachers describe their own instructional leadership practice?
2. How do teachers describe their own capacity for instructional leadership?
3. What factors do teachers perceive as levers for change in their own instructional leadership practice?

The data in this study were collected at one school district, Dodge Local Schools, in a rural county in northeast Ohio. The researcher conducted an internship project in this school district, interviewing the superintendent, two principals, and four teachers regarding the instructional leadership practices and the functionality of instructional leadership in the school district. The internship project was conducted approximately seven months prior to this research. Evidence was collected throughout the interviews and the researcher concluded that instructional leadership was not clearly articulated by anyone in the district. The findings from the Dodge Local School District indicate that quality and consistent instructional leadership is lacking in the Dodge Local School
District even though their “random acts of success” would indicate otherwise to an outsider. Furthermore, the individuals interviewed in the study did not have a thorough and appreciable understanding of instructional leadership, which resulted in vague answers and lacked depth to contribute to a thorough understanding of instructional leadership practice in the Dodge Local School District.

This chapter presents and discusses the research findings of the current study of Dodge Local School District. The structure of the chapter includes a description of the research sample, an overview of the Dodge Local School District, a description of the participants, and the findings for each research question. This research investigated the teacher perceptions of teacher instructional leadership within a K-2 and a 3-4 building as a result of increased statutory accountability demands. This study contributes to the literature about the teacher perceptions of teacher instructional leadership practices in a school district in an age of accountability demands.

**Research Question One: How Do Teachers Describe Their Own Instructional Leadership Practice?**

In order to provide a comprehensive exploration of insights into teacher instructional leadership in Dodge, teachers were asked to describe their perceptions of several different areas with the potential to impact instructional leadership. First, they were asked about their beliefs regarding how a teacher affects student achievement. This conversation led to discussing their perceptions of the instructional skill areas where they excel in the classroom. Then, the teachers shared their perceptions of their personal professional growth needs and if they contributed to overall professional development in the building. Teacher involvement in decision making within the Dodge Schools was
then examined as participants shared their experiences with the researcher. Finally, the participants shared their perceptions of responsibility in regards to instruction.

**Teacher Beliefs**

The teachers in the Dodge Local Schools described the belief structure that guides their work as instructional leaders. Initial analysis suggested that a teacher’s years of service had some influence on how they characterized their beliefs as instructional leaders and how they described their pedagogical choices and actions. Dodge Local teachers with 12 years or less of experience explained the constructs of attitude, expectations, engagement, and relationships as critical components of their students’ achievement; whereas Dodge Local teachers with more than 16 years of teaching experience focused on traits that were not student specific as their key to success, not mentioning any of the same belief factors as their younger peers.

Generally, teachers with 12 years or less experience described how a teacher’s attitude and expectations are reflected in the student’s attitude. A sampling of representative quotes is provided here. Megan Kaple, a kindergarten teacher with 12 years experience, said, “If I have an attitude that we are never going to get this, then [the kids] will feel that they can’t achieve this.” This was also reiterated by Heidi Seller, a kindergarten teacher with four years experience, when she stated, “I think if they feel that the person in charge thinks that [students] cannot do it, it will become a self-fulfilling prophecy.” Expectations were also key for Susan Miller, Title I teacher with seven years experience, in her discussion of how a teacher affects student achievement:

My philosophy is pretty simple. It basically goes through one filter and that is high expectations. . . . Your expectations are going to drive what they think they can achieve also. A teacher can really make a difference in how far a student
goes based on that. Really pushing the kids to do their best and really getting them to focus on what they were there to do, which was to learn and grow, not just in whatever content we were studying, but as a whole being. I could see the kids growing a lot based on how much I expected from them. Just having high expectations is the simplest way to put it.

Along with expectations and attitude, two novice teachers with five years or less of experience in the study perceived that student engagement was critical for student success. In general, these teachers noted that building student interest in learning creates excitement and interest in the subject matter, therefore potentially increasing student achievement. Grace Small, a first-year kindergarten tutor, said, “If students are excited about being at school, excited to learn, and are interested in what they’re doing, they will perform higher than students who are bored.” Melissa Rollins, a five-year teacher reiterated this sentiment by stating, “I feel if I am engaged and excited . . . the students will be more engaged and excited.”

Relationship building between teachers and students was mentioned as being critical to ensure that student needs were met. Georgia Kelly, a veteran 10-year Title I teacher, said,

I notice that the relationships that I am able to build with [students] and the confidence that I am able to instill in them has really helped their achievement, especially in reading, even more so than math. It has really bolstered their achievement. It is a sense of pride for them and the relationship that we have. They feel comfortable with me.

When discussing beliefs about learning with the more veteran teachers, 16 years of experience or more, they focused on traits that were not student specific. Wendy Mason, a grade one teacher with 16 years experience, described the fact that she must work well with the other team teachers in her grade level to ensure a consistent delivery of quality content. Wendy explained, “I need to work with the team teachers. . . to be
sure that we are all giving first graders the same quality of content at the first grade level that goes along with the Common Core State Standards that we are supposed to be following.” Wendy also perceived that her success with students was dependent on her working with teachers to provide for remediation as necessary. She went on to say, “Just working with [the teachers] to ensure that we can remediate these students so they can achieve just as well as the others who are on target.” Considering learning from the special education perspective was essential and Barbara Smith, an intervention specialist of 20 years, only discussed the Individual Education Plan goals of her students and standards but did not verbalize any student specific characteristics. Barbara commented that “just being able to know the standards and going by those. I am a special education teacher, so knowing their [Individual Education Plans] and what needs accomplished and making sure that I am meeting those goals.” These teachers focused on tasks like teaching the content and meeting the goals, rather than any student characteristics.

In order to further examine the discrepancy between novice and veteran teacher beliefs, teachers were asked about their perceptions concerning the impact of teacher effort on student achievement. Many of the Dodge Local teachers wanted to clarify what effort meant in order to best answer the question. Four of the novice teachers clarified their response suggesting that effort requires a combination of teacher and student energy and activity in order to improve achievement. Susan Miller, a ninth-year teacher, simply stated, “I don’t know if it is always the teacher’s effort. I know that certainly impacts it there is no question. When a teacher exerts more effort, students tend to respond. The student also has exerted effort. You can’t give all the credit to the teacher.” Three veteran teachers alluded to the fact that it takes more effort to meet students’ diverse
needs. Barbara Smith, a 20-year veteran, helped to clarify the definition of effort when she conveyed that “doing something different, differentiating, takes a lot of effort and a lot of planning . . . it takes a little more effort individually for each kid.” Wendy Mason, a 16-year veteran, shared that a teacher may exert more effort “in trying to come up with another strategy . . . to see the light, to know they are getting it . . . trying hard by giving more worksheets doesn’t mean more effort . . . doing something different because something else wasn’t working to me is effort.” Focusing on the effort to meet student needs, Allie Reckler, a 22-year veteran, expressed that “it takes more effort to get to know your students and teach them where they are each at.” Although there were subtle differences in the novice and veteran responses regarding teacher effort affecting student achievement, each teacher was clearly focused on student needs. Meeting the diverse needs of students will afford teachers the ability to target individual skills and increase the achievement of students.

**Teacher Instructional Skills**

When asked where the teachers perceived they had exceptional skills, most of the teachers hesitated answering, then began their answer with “none” and a nervous laugh. However, after reassuring them that this was their chance to boast about the area(s) where they perceived to have an exceptional skill, they proceeded to answer the question.

The answers of the teachers regarding their exceptional skill area could be initially sorted according to their years of service in teaching. The teachers with 20 or more years experience, all answered with skills that were very content specific or classroom management specific; whereas, teachers with less than 20 years experience focused more on instructional skills or methodologies. The intervention specialist,
although having 20 years of teaching experience, was an exception to the trend suggested above. The skills that she mentioned were heavily student-focused.

The veteran teachers emphasized routines, management techniques, and content-driven skills. Rose Burns, a 23-year teacher, proudly referred to her classroom routine skills when she emphasized that her most important skill set is that “I am a very organized person, so setting up that routine for my classroom and making the kids feel safe and having a good sense of where they are at when they come in is something that I do well.” Allie Reckler, a 22-year teacher, also echoed a classroom management and subject specific sentiment when she stated, “I run a pretty fair classroom and I like to have a lot of fun and I love to laugh, but my kids know when I draw the line, it’s done. I don’t put up with a lot. . . . I think I am good at teaching history specifically that subject.” Even Heather Dean, a 30-year teacher, began by mentioning that she shows kids things over and over again, but then talks about using humor as her greatest skill. Thus, it could be argued that humor makes for a more interesting and engaging classroom. However, it is also possible that Dean is using humor to circumvent the teaching and learning process, thus affording students time to enjoy the classroom and one another, but not making productive use of learning time. Seeing as how the veteran teachers focused on their greatest skills in areas that did not include instruction, it is probable that they consider management as their priority over instruction.

The Intervention Specialist with 24 years is the outlier in the veteran teacher data. She did not, like the other veteran teachers, discuss routines and management. Rather, she specifically discussed individualizing instruction and getting to know the students when she said:
I would say that individualizing with each kid and trying to find out what makes them tick and teaching different lessons. My sister is here from [Oregon] right now and we were doing crafts and I was making little statements to her about them. For instance, we were making duct tape flowers and I was telling her that rabbit goes in the hole and other things that I would tell my kids that would make it stick in their heads. I just try to make adjustments for them. I think it’s just, teaching isn’t all about standards, necessarily, it’s about getting to know each kid individually. I think that is something that I try to put extra effort into is getting to know each kid.

This perspective of a veteran teacher where she is discussing an actual instructional skill rather than a management routine is unique. She is the only veteran teacher who emphasized that she has an exceptional skill in teaching and learning. The intervention specialist’s focus on learning, rather than management like her veteran peers, is refreshing and could be the result of her priority of meeting student needs and showing progress on student Individual Education Plan goals.

The teachers with less than 20 years experience expressed a much different perspective about their skills. These individuals focused on areas of student relationships and instruction. Wendy Mason explained trying to teach using different modalities, centered on whole brain teaching, and getting kids up and moving around in the classroom. She explained “an instructional practice that I try to use and I feel that I am most strong in is trying to use those different modalities. I have the kids moving around and talking about what they are learning to each other and not just me.” Both Melissa Rollins and Megan Kaple discussed that their vision in the classroom is focused around more kinesthetic learning and hands-on activities. Megan commented, “I am probably more hands-on minded. . . . I guess just meeting the needs of every learner too. I pull towards the hands-on, the bigger events, the touching.” These younger teachers appear to have an aptitude for creating engaging activities.
Three of these teachers with less than 20 years experience also commented on relationship building with students as an area of strength. Especially insightful for a first-year teacher, Grace Small expressed, “I think I am pretty good at building rapport with the students, listening to them, and engage in conversations about things outside of school.” Heidi Seller also focused on the importance of knowing students:

I excel getting beyond the first level of getting to know the students. The relationship that I form is able to help me better tackle issues and try to get to know the student first and things about them. It makes the educational experience personal. I had a little boy who had siblings who were twins and a set of triplets in class this year. If anything came up in class about twins or triplets, I would say, like them, to tie them into the lesson. In my opinion, especially in kindergarten, the standards are important, but it is more important to me that they walk out of kindergarten sad that they are going home for the summer and that they had fun and loved learning then that they mastered every standard.

Susan Miller, a nine-year teacher, simply stated that she “[pushes] kids to be the best version of themselves.” These teachers, with less than 20 years experience are focusing on the needs of students. Focusing on these needs signals that they have teaching and learning as a priority and have an understanding of the techniques and skills necessary to improve student achievement.

While discussing areas of exceptional instructional skill with teachers, the educators also had the opportunity to identify areas where they perceived that they could use professional growth. Despite their years of service, their professional growth topics remained very similar. The kindergarten teachers and kindergarten Title I teachers all answered that they needed professional growth related to assessment practices with their students. The assessment practices they mentioned ranged from pre-assessment development to assessment record keeping to a system for student growth, which all tied back to the new accountability demands. Georgia Kelly’s response was representative of
many of the responses from kindergarten and grade one teachers when she said, “We talked about needing growth in the testing and data analysis and making sure that we are doing that completely and correctly.” Susan Miller, a grade 2 Title I teacher, and Barbara Smith, a grades 3 and 4 Intervention Specialist, both commented that they would like to just receive in-service to remain current with all the new things that are coming along and changing right now. Barbara Smith explained, “I think there are so many things that are changing right now, [the professional growth] would be to keep up on that kind of stuff.” Only one teacher of the 11 interviewed perceived that she had no choice in what she pursued via professional development. Allie Reckler, a 22-year veteran teacher, wanted more say in her professional development quest as she declared in this conversation when asked what areas of professional growth she needs:

I don’t know. I am not saying that I don’t need professional growth. I wish that I would have a little more freedom to find professional growth that interests me. If professional growth is shoved down your throat, you are going to walk away going, whatever. I had to really push to get this professional development money to go down to [Columbus] for two weekends to sit with some historians and volunteers. I asked [the historians] if what I was teaching was correct. . . . I got a lot of feedback from them about what I needed to do more of or the way it needed to be presented. That was what I really liked. When someone tells us this is what we need in professional development because this is what the state is telling us, that it is like a one size fits all that is completely different than what we preach in education. When I go to my administrator and say that I am interested in this and they say no because it is not reading or math and they are not willing to spend the money that has been allocated to teachers for professional development, really? I don’t even suggest professional development because usually what we come in contact with is reading and math so I figure it is what we are going to do.

Obviously, this individual, being a history teacher, holds a bit of hostility toward the regulation of professional development money in the Dodge Local School district, not to mention a bit of hostility, in general toward the focus on reading and math as a result of accountability demands. Although Allie was an exception, the other teachers in Dodge
tended to focus their personal professional development initiatives toward areas that would assist in acquiring skills and understandings associated with some of the new statutory accountability demands.

Instructional leadership also involves being proactive about the professional development needs of staff members. The district teachers in this study, for the most part, did not recommend professional development on a larger scale for themselves and their colleagues. Not surprising, at Dodge professional development recommendations tended to be initiated by district leadership groups or veteran staff members. Rose Burns and Barbara Smith, both veteran teachers, said that the District Leadership Team might handle some of the professional development requests if there was a need. Barbara Smith mentioned, “I have [suggested professional development for other staff members] a little bit. I think it is more like a group activity. Maybe like our District Leadership Team meetings where we are coming up with ideas or where we throw things out.”

Three teachers, each with less than five years experience in the district, shared their intimidation of suggesting professional development based on their limited years in the district, including Grace Small, a first-year teacher, Heidi Seller, a four-year teacher, and Susan Miller, a teacher with nine years experience but only one year in Dodge. These teachers all shared that they were too new to offer suggestions like professional development. For instance, Heidi Seller offered, “I don’t feel like it is my place because I am young. I don’t know. I’m not the type to voice my opinion.” When asked if she might suggest professional development in the future when she has additional experience, she answered, “I could see that, but I think a lot of it is my personality. If asked my opinion, I will happily share it, but I don’t feel like it is my place to do that. I know what
my job is and what my responsibilities are and it is not my job to tell someone what we should be doing.”

Finally three teachers with 10 years of experience or less, Megan Kaple, Georgia Kelly, and Melissa Rollins, all shared their professional development suggestions in terms of the team needs. So, even though they were asked what they do individually to suggest professional development, they changed the question and shared what they ask for collectively, as a team. For instance, Melissa Rollins shared, “We asked if we could have some training on iPads.” Georgia Kelly also spoke in terms of what her team needed when she replied, “There have been different opportunities that we have seen the need and seen the hole and tried to find a way to fill it.”

The answers from teachers about their professional development suggestions for themselves and their colleagues were collectively weak. They seemed to either hide behind their lack of experience as a hurdle to suggesting professional development outright or used their grade level team as a safety net for offering suggestions.

Teachers as Decision Makers

Dodge Local teachers, in the K-2 building, participating in this research project, were not overly concerned with being involved in the decision-making process. For the most part, the decisions that they described as their own were superficial and not central to the instructional process in the least. In fact, their decisions were not complex processes, but rather choices that they were making about relatively trivial school matters. For instance, Grace Small provided the following example to illustrate this point when she said, “Special events that we did for the kids, Right to Read week, we helped to
make those decisions.” The teachers participating from the grades 3-4 building seemed more vested in the decision-making process.

Decision making in schools is key, especially since decisions are essential to determine school improvement activities. Although routine choices are made daily, core decisions that are focused on the long-term goals have three key advantages according to Kruse and Louis (2009): it maintains a focus on the core organizational issues and principles, it affords one to adapt and innovate while focusing on student learning, and it provides a coherent and consistent culture around the success of the school. Decisions, therefore, should be deeper processes that protect these three core principles. If staff members are merely reacting to questions without these principles at the root of their thinking, then their answers are merely superficial choices and they are not engaged in decision making.

To illustrate this further, three teachers were interviewed from the 3-4 building regarding the decision-making process. Two of the teachers from this building, Allie Reckler and Barbara Smith, have been participants on Dodge Local committees such as the Local Professional Development Committee, the Building Leadership Team, the District Leadership Team, and both even holding leadership positions in the teacher’s association. Their participation on these committees has created a feeling of involvement in the decision-making process in the building and even in the district. Allie Reckler, a grade 3 teacher and veteran staff member, reported,

Actually, I have been involved in a lot of committees. . . . I was on the founding committee of the [Local Professional Development Committee], where the district stepped back and let us plan things. I have been on different committees that are intra-district like the DLT and BLT. I am not on them currently. I have had administration come and talk to me about different things. I think my voice gets heard.
Barbara Smith also feels included in decision making as she stated,

I think [the district] has done a good job of including me in things that are happening and decisions that are being made. It’s just like any business too. Sometimes, it’s just like I have to take a step back and say that I have a job to do and they are doing what they need to do for the school district to survive. All I guess that I ask is that they listen to what we have to say and make their decision after.

However, Heather Dean, a grade 3 teacher in the same building answered the question with a bit of hostility as she piped,

For the longest time we really were involved in decision-making. This past year I was highly frustrated and disappointed because I thought it was the first year that I thought that I didn’t have input. I feel there were administrative changes this year and that was the reason. We were pretty much told things. It was tough.

Obviously, the tone and reaction of Heather to decision making was quite different than her peers in her building. Heather did not mention any committees on which she served, like her colleagues, which could account for the perceived difference. For Heather, the possibility exists that the shared decision making that she thought she was taking part in was not shared as much as it was one sided. All of these teachers answered these questions about decision making confidently, perceiving that their involvement on these committees was true decision making. However, none of the teachers shared any evidence that their decisions were based on any of the three core principles of school improvement mentioned by Kruse and Louis (2009). Thus, they were most like pawns taking part in trivial decisions on district committees.

At the K-2 building, decision making was viewed as more of a team initiative than an individual initiative by teachers who had less than 10 years experience. For instance, Grace Small answered this question stating, “[The team tries] to get together a lot. We have weekly team meetings to help make decisions at that level.” Melissa
Rollins also responded in a similar fashion, “I feel that we are communicating with our Title coordinator. [The Title I teachers] are trying to give her as much information as we know she is very open [minded].” Finally, Susan Miller shared, “Just as [the Title I teachers] see a need, we bring it up with the principal and we get help.” The limited experience of these teachers forced them to view decision making as a team initiative because they lacked the confidence to make decisions on their own because of their novice status in the district. 

This was confirmed by Wendy Mason when she said, “There is one person that has been there longer and we look to her a lot to make a lot of the decisions. She has been there more and she has been a part of the system, [longer] and she knows it. It is nice to have that leadership even in our small group.” Thus, veteran status teachers are viewed and relied upon to be the decision makers by the novice teachers. The irony is that the veteran teachers did not mention these decisions that they are supposedly making for their novice teacher peers. The principal, being the central shaper of the school culture, has not done an effective job of ensuring that all staff members are involved in decision making in the school (Supovitz et al., 2010). However, these “decisions” made by the veteran staff members are merely superficial choices, like field day events, specials rotations, and fundraisers, rather than the embedded instructional decisions that the researcher would hope to uncover. Kennedy, Deuel, Nelson, and Slavit (2011) also confirmed Kruse and Louis’ (2009) point that these ‘decisions’ are not decisions at all because they are not school improvement related. However, Kennedy et al. (2011) also contributed that the other teachers most likely look to the veteran teachers to make the decisions because of their status, expertise, and authority. They mentioned that veteran
Heidi Seller, a four-year teacher, contributed a completely different perspective about decision-making involvement:

At times our opinions are asked, like at staff meetings. When we are planning field day, they might ask how you want to do this or what are your thoughts on this. I am comfortable where I am. If they ask me to get involved because they needed me, I would happily do it. I don’t feel the need to give my opinion. Maybe it’s because I am in a good situation and I respect the people making the decision. I trust what they are going to do.

Heidi’s perspective did not demonstrate the team philosophy of her novice teaching peers. Instead, she seemed comfortable with a top-down decision-making approach. As she mentioned, this could result from her personality being more submissive or just having a true respect for those currently making the decisions administratively. Even if asked to become more involved in decision making, the decisions or choices that teachers are faced with are as Heidi mentioned, opinions. Their input is so trivial that even though they may think that they are involved and satisfied with their input, it is still relatively inadequate. However, she seemed to be comfortable with the fact that little to no input is okay. Either way, Heidi did not rely on the safety net of her teammates to make decisions as did her similar experienced peers.

Accountability mandates were the decisions made without teacher input that impacted instructional practice in Dodge Local. Four teachers, each with less than 16 years experience, in Dodge Local noted statutory accountability decisions as decisions that they were not involved in making, but decisions that would, nonetheless, impact their instructional practice in the classroom. Wendy Mason still struggles with the Third Grade Guarantee, what it means and whether it is negative or positive. Puzzled, she
admitted, “I worry about all the testing and the authenticity of learning. I don’t know if I would have gotten into teaching if I knew this is the direction it was going. I feel like sometimes there is more punishment involved in being a teacher.” Melissa Rollins also mentioned that the Third Grade Guarantee impacted how Title I served children in the building, thus impacting her reading instruction. However, her realization of the impact of the legislation decision was much more positive than Wendy’s as she countered, “At first I was hesitant [about the service change] because I am not big on change, but I think it’s so beneficial for the kids. That’s what it is all about.”

Implementation of the Common Core State Standards was mentioned by Megan Kaple as the “biggest thing that has come and rocked us for a while. That affected the whole classroom. Affected everything we did in our classroom.” Georgia Kelly explained the district mandate of teachers taking Formative Instructional Practice (FIP) modules, which were a result of the Ohio Improvement Process. After watching the modules and completing the associated activities online, teachers then had additional work to complete. Georgia said, “Our grade level team put in a ton of work breaking down the standards and writing I can statements and those very much affected our instruction.” Each of these novice teachers noted statutory accountability demands as decisions that impacted their instruction but were outside their sphere of influence. Although they were not involved in the decisions, they implemented them and they said that some even resulted in a positive impact on classroom instruction, although no specific examples of the impact were noted.

Aside from statutory decisions, there was only one school-based decision made that was mentioned by a teacher which they were not involved in making that affected
their instructional practice, which meets the criteria for a decision by Kruse and Louis (2009). The decision was made outside of their control and was perceived in a negative manner to some degree. Rose Burns remembered a vocabulary strategy mandated by the Title I coordinator. It required all K-2 teachers to include the strategy in their classroom instruction even though “it was one more thing to do and [she doesn’t] remember asking for it.”

When asked about other decisions that impacted their instructional practice, teachers brought up several scenarios that would not fit the criteria for a decision but would rather illustrate poor communication practices and leadership in the district. For instance, Heather Dean and Barbara Smith echoed the same frustrations when they spoke about the special services supervisor mandating two different intervention practices with two different students without their input. Heather’s reaction to this administrator mandate could best be explained by her words:

I was just told that this was what I needed to do. I was really given no help on what else to do and I was very frustrated. The frustration was the person telling me that I needed to do this. I felt very frustrated that I wasn’t getting support or help. This took time away from my teaching and planning and helping kids at the end of the day.

Heidi’s comment reflected that she was not as frustrated with the mandate as she was with the idea that she did not get input or any type of support after the mandate. Barbara expressed similar frustration when she said:

There was a student who they decided would come to my room if he was having a meltdown. There were many times that I had to leave instruction to tend to him. It definitely made the class time a struggle. I don’t want to go across the boundaries of what I should do, but I don’t want to be defiant. I want to be fair to the other students.
Barbara wanted to serve the student in the best way possible. However, her frustration stemmed from the fact that she was not included in the decision. The special education supervisor made the decision about the student without her. Barbara wanted to ensure that she was fair to the student with the behavior issue as well as fair to the other students she serves. This decision being made in isolation without her input did not afford her the ability to consider the needs of other students that, ultimately, impacted her classroom instruction. Even though these “decisions” do not meet the school improvement criteria to be classified as such, the poor communication and leadership presented could contribute to poor school culture (Kruse & Louis, 2009; Printy & Marks, 2006).

Another example of how poor communication can affect school culture, Allie Reckler believed that the decision to move classrooms the last two days of school affected teacher attitudes, which impacted their instruction:

We had to move classrooms the last two days of school and weren’t told. Apparently this had been brewing. It is because we have a boy who is in a wheelchair, but the teachers that he needed are in a part of the building that he would need to travel outside of the building a lot. I don’t begrudge the reasoning. It’s unfortunate. In a year we will be in a handicapped accessible building. This has been brewing and nobody said anything to us, including the custodial staff or the technology staff. Then it was just flopped in our laps, oh by the way, can you move at the last moment. We weren’t given boxes to move and we had to find everything ourselves. I asked if we were going to get boxes and they gave us some storage bins. They were put in the library, but nobody told us so unless you stumbled upon them you did not know they were there. . . . It was a mess. Literally my kids were throwing things into bags to move me and they would take things to the room I was moving to and that teacher would yell at them while I was still in my room packing. I was just trying to get it done because they said you need to move as much as possible. I have a lot to unpack. It was just disappointing that there was no communication where we could have seen it coming and avoided a lot of pitfalls. I am not saying that we need 20 people making the decision, we just need to have some information. It impacted our attitude a lot the last few days of school. We were just ticked off. Then again, it wasn’t the reason we were moving because we love this little boy. Just because nobody said anything until the final minute. The room that you thought you were going in, or somebody else is coming in your room, there were a lot of loose ends.
I try to have a good end of the year for the kids. My attitude was affected and they were getting yelled at by the other teacher in the new room. It was frustrating. I try to be pretty positive for my kids.

Like her peers, Allie was not as frustrated with the decision as she was with the manner in which the decision was made. If there was better communication and some teacher input, she believes that much of the anxiety and stress experienced as a result of the decision would have been eliminated. Allie believed that classroom instruction over the last two days of school was lost because of the stress of the situation. Even if little new instruction occurs over those last 40 hours in a grade level, Allie shared that the classroom time should be positive to prepare students for the next grade level and to put closure on the school year.

These stories told by Dodge educators illustrated a few instances of how they believe decisions affected, positive, negative, or neutral, their instructional practice in the classroom. Kruse and Louis’ (2009) concepts surrounding decisions focusing on school improvement clarified the fact that many of the Dodge Local decisions contributed by the research participants were merely comments and superficial choices. The Dodge Local teachers, for the most part, seemed content with the impact of their choices. Their frustration stemmed less from the statutory accountability demands, which are true decisions, and more from the poor communication and leadership impacting their school culture.

**Instructional Responsibility**

Responsibility for learning focuses directly on what is needed to improve student achievement (Fulmer, 2006). Abelman and Elmore (1999) describe this concept of responsibility for learning as a relationship between three factors: individual conceptions
of responsibility (personal values that define responsibilities), accountability mechanisms (means by which people in schools account for actions), and expectations (shared norms and values). The responsibility data gathered during the study included teacher perceptions regarding what teachers are responsible for in their instruction, to whom they are responsible, how they are responsible and what the ramifications are if they do not fulfill their given responsibilities. Data were organized according to Abelman and Elmore’s (1999) factors of individual responsibility, accountability mechanisms, and expectations.

**Individual Responsibility**

Regardless of their years of experience, all 11 teachers interviewed in Dodge Local perceived that they were individually responsible for the content that they were teaching the students. However, most of their answers did not reflect anything substantive about instructional responsibility. For instance, four teachers specifically mentioned that they were responsible for teaching the Common Core State Standards. Rose Burns simply stated, “Teaching the Common Core State Standards. I am responsible for making sure that all of my students learn that.” Melissa Rollins said something similar, “As an instructional leader, I think you are responsible for all the standards that are required throughout the school year.” Heather Dean also voiced agreement as she stated, “I am responsible to meet the state standards by the end of the year as best I can and to prepare them.” Finally, Megan Kaple also expressed the need for teachers to be responsible for the standards as she shared, “Meeting all of the Common Core State Standards is my job and only my job.”
Coupled with their superficial beliefs about their responsibilities regarding the standards, teachers also shared seemingly cursory views of their individual responsibility in regards to students and other stakeholders. Barbara Smith affirmed this when she said, “My first response would be that I am responsible to the student. Because if I am not doing my job, I am not doing the student justice.” Ten of the teachers also commented that they were responsible to the students’ parents. Wendy Mason acknowledged that she is also responsible to other team members and staff members. Although teachers believed it essential to mention whom they are responsible to in their jobs, they did not provide further details.

Two teachers unpacked the idea of individual instructional responsibility a bit more comprehensively. Heidi Seller explained her responsibility in the classroom:

I think that I am responsible for first knowing what needs to be taught. Then, knowing where my students are. Then knowing the best way to get them to understand what they need to. Or, if they already understand it, knowing how to get them to the next level and having everything prepared for that to happen. Then, assessing if they understood it. And then either reteaching or enriching what they got.

Heather Dean also spoke more directly about the need to be responsible for more than students learning the state standards:

For all the students, I am responsible to meet the state standards by the end of the year as best we can and prepare them. I don’t worry about the test as much as I worry about are you ready for next year, all across the board. They might be ready reading-wise, but if their social skills, organizational skills, handwriting skills, and all of these things are factored in, I think what are you going to do next year? I feel like I am responsible for the broad spectrum, not just to pass the test in the spring. I worry about it, but I don’t let it freak me out because that is just a small portion of what they need to be ready. I have some that are ready, thinking-wise, but if they don’t get themselves organized, what are they going to do when they are switching classes? There are a lot of things involved.
It was apparent that these two teachers, regardless of years of service, are concerned about instructional responsibility and what is required to accomplish it in the classroom. Their explanations of instructional responsibility were not merely a parroting of the standards, but rather a description of the instructional practices necessary to beget student achievement.

Taking individual responsibility to a new level, Heidi Seller, Rose Burns, and Wendy Mason each were self-reflective. Wendy Mason perceived it to be important to include “myself” in her list of whom she is responsible for and to with her instruction. Rose Burns explained, “I am sort of an employee of my students. I am thinking that I am responsible to them to make sure that they are learning.” Heidi Seller reasoned, “I think I am responsible to myself too because if I have no accountability too, then why am I doing this?” Individual responsibility to these individuals took on a different meaning than to the other teachers. Where most of the other teachers, with the exception of Heidi Seller and Heather Dean, were casually mentioning a person or two to whom they should be responsible, these teachers determined that their beliefs should be reflected in their own behavior as well.

**Accountability Mechanisms**

Digging deeper into responsibility, teachers were then asked to reflect on how they are responsible for learning, which provides responses to Abelman’s and Elmore’s (1999) accountability mechanisms. Ten of the 11 teachers spoke about testing or statutory accountability demands as a means of how they are responsible for learning. Specifically, the Third Grade Guarantee, the Local Report Card, Student Learning Objectives (SLOs), Ohio Teacher Evaluation System (OTES), and Ohio Achievement
Assessments were described as accountability measures by the Dodge Local teachers. All of the accountability demands mentioned by teachers are external accountability factors. Ironically, a school’s external accountability response is largely determined by the alignment of the internal accountability system to the external accountability system (Abelman & Elmore, 1999). Such an alignment appears to be lacking at Dodge.

An additional accountability factor mentioned by some of the Dodge Local teachers was their responsibility in terms of student safety and wellness. Rose Burns simply remarked that it is important to her that a child makes it through her classroom happy to ensure that she is responsible. Georgia Kelly furthered this thought when she said, “You know to see [students] grow and to talk to [students] and see even the twinkle or light in their eye. Which isn’t something that you can write down or have data for, but it is something to show that they are happy and growing.” Heather Dean also reiterated the importance of other life skills being demonstrated by students:

Also responsible that [students] are organized. I think third grade is a big jump. I have to be able to have my things organized, my homework done, my homework written down. They become more independent because third grade is a stepping stone from depending on teacher for a lot of things to fourth grade they are expected to do a lot of things on their own. Independence is them being able to be responsible for themselves.

Although accounting for student well-being is commendable, student well-being would not be considered an internal accountability mechanism as it is not measurable. Thus, once again this provides evidence of Dodge Local’s lack of a coherent, mutually understood and adopted internal accountability system.
Expectations

Being responsible for learning and student needs is a credible, yet daunting task. Expectations, although by Abelman and Elmore’s (1999) definition should be shared, can vary among groups within a school. Teachers in Dodge were posed with the question about the consequences of them not fulfilling their responsibilities or living up to their expectations. Wendy Mason discussed the importance of her team members’ support and honesty if she is not fulfilling her expectations by saying, “Well, I will hear about it from, usually, I would say my team members that this isn’t quite right.” Heather Dean also echoed hearing from other teachers when obligations are not met:

Next year we hear about it from the grade four teachers, which is fine. I like it that they tell us what the kids don’t know or what we need to work on better with the kids. . . . I think across the board, the elementary teachers communicate with each other. Thank goodness we are good friends with the grade four teachers. I do not get offended when they tell us.

Groups that share similar expectations can hold one another accountable, which is a form of internal accountability.

Six teachers referenced the Ohio Teacher Evaluation System. These individuals discussed how not meeting the expectations as a teacher could place your employment in peril. Wendy Mason explained, “I am going to lose my job if I don’t fulfill my responsibilities or get called on the carpet.” When speaking with Georgia Kelly, she simply stated if she doesn’t meet her expectations as a Title I teacher, “I don’t get a contract back. I am on a one-year, part-time contract. They won’t give me a contract. If I don’t fulfill my responsibilities and I am not doing my job, then the children suffer and it is wasted time. It would be the biggest downfall.” Susan Miller agreed with the
consequences of the Ohio Teacher Evaluation System mandates. When discussing the ramifications of not fulfilling obligations, Susan divulged,

Well, now you are put on watch and it could eventually cost you your job. Which I think is fine. It happens in any other job. If you do not perform, you probably will not continue in that job. They are trying to figure out a way so that teachers are held to a standard, a certain standard, just like anybody else who is in a profession. They are trying to make something work”. Thus, according to the teachers at Dodge Local, the Ohio Teacher Evaluation System will hold teachers accountable to expectations for performance that if not met could involve consequences as dire as job loss.

Instructional Responsibility Outlier

Allie Reckler’s comments were much different than her peers when asked about expectations. Her answers throughout the instructional responsibility questions focused on negative themes where she first expressed frustration about all of the accountability demands, there are “all of these accountability demands and it seems like you hear about it once or twice and you are really supposed to understand it.” After voicing her concern over the multitude of accountability demands, she continued to rant about the expectations of her teaching positions when she answered,

I told [my kids and parents] them at the first parent teacher conference that I don’t do everything that I am supposed to do and someday I may get fired for it. But I am going to do my best to teach your kid. . . . I almost buried my head in the sand with all of these acronyms and until someone tells me I have to do it, let me just teach. I think I am pretty good. I am not perfect. I am not the best. I get things wrong. But just let me teach. Not letting me teach is the reason that I will get out before my 38 years come.

Then, she went on to continue to express frustration about the accountability mandates that accompany testing and the expectations therein,

Those tests. It’s like every time the scores come in we get patted on the back and then we are told in the next breath that it is not enough, you need to get better. . . . Well, I am sorry, I am not perfect. It goes back to that home life. I can’t control home. I can’t control when my fourth grader stays up until 2 o’clock in the
morning. And to me, if a kid falls asleep in the classroom, I let them sleep because there is a reason that the kid needs sleep.

So, when Allie was finally asked what happens if she does not fulfill her responsibilities, the pot was already stirred. She replied,

Well, I haven’t. I don’t know if I have crossed the line that I haven’t fulfilled it yet. I anticipate a bad evaluation and being called on the carpet. If it leads to dismissal because I am doing what I think is best, not be egocentric, but just common sense. All I want to do is teach a kid to read, write, and do some math and have some fun doing it.

Allie seemed frustrated by the accountability system and the mandates in place that she was required to respond to as a teacher.

Responsibility for learning was not defined by teacher years of service as the other responses were throughout the first research question. However, framing teacher responses regarding instructional responsibility in terms of Abelman and Elmore’s (1999) criteria of individual responsibility, accountability mechanisms, and expectations provided a schema for teacher responses. Allie Reckler’s answers tended to be somewhat hostile and dissimilar from her peers in regard to instructional responsibility, expectations and accountability.

Based on the data collected, teachers’ instructional practices have been impacted to a certain degree by accountability demands.

**Research Question Two: How Do Teachers Describe Their Own Capacity for Instructional Leadership?**

Instructional leadership practice requires the successful implementation of beliefs, instructional skills, professional growth, decision making, and responsibility, which were discussed and reviewed in research question one. However, a teacher’s capacity to
practice instructional leadership must also be examined in order to determine more successful instructional leadership practices. Teachers were asked to describe their perceptions of several different arenas that impact their capacity to practice instructional leadership. First, they were asked about the district and school vision and improvement plan. This conversation led to discussing their perceptions of what the district is trying to accomplish. Then, the teachers shared their perceptions of the sharing of best practices and if they were viewed as an instructional resource person. Finally, collaborative culture was discussed.

**District/School Vision**

An effective instructional leader establishes an educational vision so expectations for learning can be established and the school personnel can maintain a clear focus on student learning (Murphy et al., 2007). Nanus (1992) described vision as “a realistic, credible, attractive future for your organization”; “a destination toward which your organization should aim”; “a signpost pointing the way for all who need to understand what the organization is and where it intends to go” (pp. 8-9). A vision is not a measurable goal that is attainable in the short term (McEwan, 2003). Rather, visions are more global in nature (McEwan, 2003) or a dream of what can become (Peterson & Deal, 2002). Schlechty (2002) reminded us “vision statements, if they are important, are not intended to be realistic but to be inspiring” (p. 63).

Vision serves an essential purpose in educational settings. Visions, although not measurable or attainable in the short term, are critical components of leadership, without which, leadership is destined to fail (Nanus, 1992). With the multitude of tasks, initiatives, and reforms in education, a vision provides educators the “power and
impetus” for schools to achieve success (Chance, 1992, p. 40). Nanus (1992) contended that the right vision empowers individuals and moves them to action, which allows the organization to move forward and make progress.

A clear instructional vision is necessary for improving teaching and learning and provides a picture of the school in the future (Deal & Peterson, 2009; Johnson & Chrispeels, 2010; Lashway, 2002). Nanus (1992) described two properties required to make every good vision. Every vision requires the acknowledgement that the vision only exists in the imagination as it is actually a mental model of the future (Nanus, 1992). The second property of a good vision described by Nanus (1992) is that although visions are idealistic, they must present a worthy challenge to those who are accepting of it. If these two requirements are met, the vision will be considered to be worthy. Nanus (1992) also delineated a list of factors that describe what a vision is not in order to determine if the statement is indeed a vision. A vision is not a prophecy; it does not state the purpose; it is not factual; it cannot be answered with true or false; it should not be static; it should not constrain actions (Nanus, 1992). Thus, a vision needs to be a mental model of the future and must present a challenge to those who accept it.

In addition to the properties of a vision, a vision is comprised of four essential elements: information, values, a framework, and insight (Nanus, 1992). Values are the “principles or standards that help people decide what is worthwhile or desirable” (Nanus, 1992, p. 34). In turn, the values of each individual guide the questions that one chooses to ask and therefore the information gathered and evaluated. The information and values build the framework to identify the big picture of organization (Nanus, 1992). Then,
insight is applied and intuition often is enacted to implement the vision. The vision must be clearly articulated and implemented to be successful (Nanus, 1992).

Once the vision is established the mission, or short term, day-by-day behaviors of the school, emerge from it (McEwan, 2003). A vision states an organization’s direction, whereas a mission states its purpose (Nanus, 1992). A mission statement “defines what the organization has been established to accomplish” (Nanus, 1992, p. 46). A mission statement can then be unraveled to create actions steps (Schlechty, 1997). It is essential that the mission be created by the entire school community to ensure that there is ownership and consensus of where everyone wants to go together (McEwan, 2003). A mission is comprised of values, beliefs, and norms (Peterson & Deal, 2002).

The beliefs, values, and norms of teachers comprise their knowledge base and are applied to educational practice to create their professional vision. Beliefs are “understandings about the world around us” (Peterson & Deal, 2002, p. 14). As described previously, values are the “principles or standards that help people decide what is worthwhile or desirable” (Nanus, 1992, p. 34); also described as “the core of what the school considers important” (Peterson & Deal, 2002, p. 14). Norms are the “unstated rules and prescriptions that staff and students are supposed to follow” (Peterson & Deal, 2002, p. 14). These shared beliefs; values, and norms in a school building form the core of understandings that build a school culture (Kruse & Louis, 2009).

When asking teachers about the district vision, it was obvious that there was no clearly shared and understood vision in the district. Considering that the district vision establishes expectations for teaching and learning and therefore school improvement hinges upon it, it is concerning to note that that vision in Dodge was not clear, not even
murky (Murphy et al., 2007). Teachers provided an extensive range of responses, indicating that the district vision is either lacking completely or, providing Dodge the benefit of the doubt, perhaps it is not stated and understood. The responses indicated an uncoordinated set of initiatives in Dodge Local, rather than an established vision.

Vision and Accountability

A few Dodge Local teachers indicated that they perceive the district vision as dynamically changing to follow state initiatives or accountability demands. They insisted that the vision changed as the initiatives at the state changed and indicated that they considered this to be important in framing their perspective. Wendy Mason was one of these teachers and explained that the district is “following the Common Core State Standards and what the state tells us. I am not happy with all the things the state tells us to do. I am okay with it as long as the district backs up their teachers as best they can.” Georgia Kelly also perceives that the state is fueling the district vision, as she said, “[The district] made Battelle [initiatives such as Formative Instructional Practices] and the new Common Core State Standards a priority and I think that has affected my instruction.” Barbara Smith also emphasized the accountability demands as a driving force behind the vision when she commented, “I think that with all these different things, like this list of accountability demands, we are working on that. It has been a group effort, teachers and administrators to create that vision. It definitely has become a driving force behind what I do in my classroom.” Thus, although these teachers do not state the vision in any particular words, they believe it is in a state of constant flux. These educators view the accountability demands as important and essential components of the district structure. Instead of the vision being a driving force, these educators, have reduced their concept of
vision to their district initiatives, or what the district views as important about education and success.

**Vision and High Expectations**

Some teachers in Dodge Local perceived that the district vision was not a concrete statement, but rather referred to high expectations in the district. Heidi Seller and Heather Dean spoke of the high expectations in the district. Heidi said, “The district has been excellent [on the Local Report Card] for 11 years. That is a driving force [behind our progress] because we don’t want someone to pass us.” Heather explained, “I think Dodge has high expectations and I think that is why we have succeeded in the past.” Grace Small also spoke superficially about student expectations by mentioning, “I think as a district they want the students to perform and be successful. They want the students to go to college.” These statements indicated that although a specific vision may be lacking, an implied expectation of excellence is the norm that signifies the importance of established initiatives within the district.

**Vision and Student Needs**

The Dodge Local teachers claim to care about kids and want to meet each of their needs and this is the way they tend to daily business. For instance, Rose Burns spoke in general about student success when she stated, “We want what’s best for kids. We differentiate instruction and make sure kids aren’t falling through the cracks.” Her perception indicated that she feels personally responsible for student success. Melissa Rollins also discussed meeting student needs saying, “I think the philosophy at Dodge is very good because they want us to meet the needs of all students. Because it is such a
small school it is easier to meet the needs of all students.” Although these teachers focused specifically on how they could meet student needs through instruction, Susan Miller approached student needs more holistically. She incorporated the needs of the whole child into the district vision when she spoke:

Different districts feel different. Even in subbing you can feel a different feeling for what their expectations are for their kids. Dodge feels pretty good. It is not just about the scores. They want their students to perform and be ready for life but it is more than that. It is about character. It is about the whole student. It is about being able to contribute back to the community and be a part of the community. It is not detached from normal life. It feels holistic. That is a big driving force for the kids. They feel more willing to dig in if they feel that they are part of something that matters. Being a part of a community, a good community, that they want to continue living in and keeping it nice and keeping it going is a bigger driving force than you have to pass the test. Some kids have that and some kids don’t. But knowing that it is important because getting an education, not passing a test, knowing that’s important, because you need to learn what you need to learn so you can contribute. Be a member that is giving something.

Susan also approached the vision as a personal responsibility, but she extended this to include more than academics and incorporated character and life skills to make it more comprehensive. Although these Dodge Local teachers perceived they were speaking about the district vision, in reality, they were just referring to a set of uncoordinated initiatives in the district.

**Vision Clarity and Presence**

Finally, a few teachers admitted that they were not aware of the district vision or it did not affect their instructional practice. This is perhaps the most realistic picture of the vision of Dodge. These teachers may seem like outliers, but they may be more in touch with the true state of affairs in Dodge where a vision appears to be lacking. Allie Reckler voiced her opinion about the district vision and her instruction:
Honestly, it doesn’t change my student instruction. Everything changes. To me, the district’s vision is there. I keep hearing over and over, yes we are Excellent, you know 13 years, or whatever, but it is never good enough. So, it is never going to be good enough. Then, everything changes at the state level. So, you are going one direction one day and another direction another day. So, they are scrambling like most districts are. So, I kind of hunker down in my classroom and just go back to my basics. I focus on interest level with the kids, making sure that I am teaching them solid skills that are transferable and having fun.

Like her peers, Allie mentioned Dodge’s Excellent Local Report Card rating, which is indicative of the accountability initiatives in the district. Megan Kaple discussed her intrinsic motivation to provide quality instruction instead of using the district vision:

I am not sure if it is the district that drives me. I am really competitive to a fault sometimes. I just think that growing up with a ‘B’ was not okay. Even in my job, my vision and my achievement that I want my kids to have drives me more than the district. It ends up fine because I said that I set the bar high enough for my kids to do that. It is not that the district vision does not matter, but I think it is more my intrinsic vision and motivation that trump that for me. I just think that as a team that we are kind of like that because we know where we want to be. Our honest bar is above the Common Core State Standards to give them a great start. Our team’s goals and visions are the most important at the kindergarten level to us.

Megan has her own beliefs about student learning and the responsibility that she feels for it. Clearly, Megan and Allie were upfront about the vision, or lack of vision, in Dodge.

The district vision was not clearly identifiable in Dodge. A vision is not a short-term goal and a clear instructional vision is necessary for improving teaching and learning and provides a picture of the school in the future (Deal & Peterson, 2009; Johnson & Chrispeels, 2010; Lashway, 2002). The random strategies that the teachers mentioned as components of the vision are nothing more than just the uncoordinated sets of initiatives that may or may not be guided by an improvement plan.

The Dodge Local teachers shared components of district initiatives during the discussion about vision. However, their contributions lacked the factors that comprise a
true vision in a school district. Teachers in Dodge Local did not provide a vision that is comprised of inspirational components, which describe a picture of the district in the future (Nanus, 1992; Schlechty, 2002). Nanus (1992) explained that a vision should also provide the power to motivate individuals to action in order to challenge them to complete tasks. Furthermore, a vision should be comprised of four essential elements: information, values, a framework, and insight (Nanus, 1992). In order for a vision to exist, these components and descriptors must be present. However, the teachers in Dodge Local never mentioned any of these factors, nor did they include any of these elements in what they perceived to be the vision. Clearly, the teachers in Dodge were mistakenly identifying random education initiatives as a vision.

**Improvement Plan**

The district improvement plan is a critical component for successful instructional leadership. An improvement plan affords a district an opportunity for aligned goals, strategies and actions, which could ultimately result in reflection, feedback, and better problem solving leading to student achievement (McLaughlin, 1993). Often, when discussing school improvement, the terms improvement plans and strategic plans are used interchangeably. However, it is important to note the distinct differences and similarities between the two plans as they both can assist a school district in its improvement efforts.

A strategic plan is necessary to establish the framework for the direction of instruction in a school district. A strategic plan serves as a tool to make budget decisions and decisions about resources in a school district (Hinton, 2012). It can be a useful and powerful tool if placed in the hands of a capable leader (Schlechty, 1997).
The components of a strategic plan (mission statement, vision statement, goals, and implementation plan) each serve a specific purpose (Hinton, 2012). The mission statement is a basic statement of purpose that delineates what the organization is here to accomplish (Hinton, 2012). The vision statement describes what the organization intends to “become” in the future (Hinton, 2012). In other words, the mission describes the current state of the organization and the vision states what the organization hopes to become in the future (Hinton, 2012). Thus, a strategic plan’s goal is to “bridge the gap” between the vision and mission statements (Hinton, 2012, p. 10). A goal in a strategic plan is a target that can be “checked off” once completed (Hinton, 2012, p. 11). The implementation plan is a strategic plan then converts the goals into actions, which may change frequently based on environmental and situational factors (Hinton, 2012).

Kaufman and Herman (1991) described the strategic plan framework, or components, in a different way, including a scope, data collection, planning, implementation, and evaluation. The scope of a plan includes considering existing needs and future opportunities by asking the following questions: “What is? What should be? and What could be?” (Kaufman & Herman, 1991, p. 43). Thus, developing a scope includes the components of mission and vision, as these determine what the current state of organization is and what it intends to become, respectively. After a scope for the plan is decided, the data collection phase is entered, which includes identifying the needs of the district (Kaufman & Herman, 1991). The data collection phase is an additional step that Hinton (2012) does not mention in her strategic plan components. It only makes sense to collect data to determine what the current state of the district is in order to plan for where to go. The planning phase is next where the data collected are analyzed,
differences are discussed, and the selection of the district’s future is determined (Kaufman & Herman, 1991). In the planning phase, a committee of stakeholders, composed of community members, faculty and staff, as well as organizational leaders meet to sort through the data to determine the next step in the district and create the goals. Then, the action steps are developed to meet the parameters selected. Finally, the implementation and evaluation stage is entered. The strategic plan is a dynamic process where the components are continually evaluated as they are implemented and changes are made to the plan as necessary to continue the district moving in the right direction.

A school improvement plan serves as a tool for a school to manage the external accountability demands and develop internal accountability measures and processes as a result (Mintrop & MacLellan, 2002). Mintrop and MacLellan (2002) explained that an improvement plan contains clear goals that are focused on student achievement, activities directed toward curriculum and instruction, and professional development geared to developing new skills to enhance student achievement. This plan can answer the questions of “what are we doing” and “where are we going” (Kruse & Louis, 2009, p. 169). According to Smylie (2010, p. 82) a school improvement plan contains the following essential elements:

1. Get your vision and core values clear.
2. Determine where you are with respect to your vision and values, using evidence to identify differences and assess likely reasons for those differences.
3. Set goals and objectives for addressing these differences.
4. Identify strategies to achieve these goals and objectives and develop plans for implementing them.

5. Implement these strategies.

6. Assess their implementation and outcomes, feed this information back into the first and second steps, and begin the cycle again.

These improvement plan steps were framed from the Shewhart Cycle in 1939 where the steps were simplified into the Plan, Do, Check, Act cycle (Smylie, 2010). The Shewhart cycle components can be aligned with the more detailed elements of the improvement plan cycle presented by Smylie (2010) and seen in Table 4.

Table 4
Shewhart and Smylie Plan Components

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Shewhart Cycle of 1939</th>
<th>Details of Shewhart Cycle</th>
<th>Smylie (2010) Improvement Plan Components</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Plan</td>
<td>• Addresses goals</td>
<td>1. Get your vision and core values clear.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• What changes must be</td>
<td>2. Determine where you are with respect to your vision and values, using evidence to identify differences and assess likely reasons for those differences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>made to meet the goals</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Assess availability of</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>data to see if changes</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>achieve the objectives</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Developing a plan for a</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>change</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do</td>
<td>• Carrying out the</td>
<td>5. Implement these strategies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>change</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4

Shewhart and Smylie Plan Components (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Shewhart Cycle of 1939</th>
<th>Details of Shewhart Cycle</th>
<th>Smylie (2010) Improvement Plan Components</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Check</td>
<td>• Observe the effects of</td>
<td>6. Assess their implementation and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>the change</td>
<td>outcomes, feed this information back</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>into the first and second steps and</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>begin the cycle again.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Act</td>
<td>• Study what was observed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>to determine what to do</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>next</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Leads back to “Plan”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As outlined, the Plan, Do, Check, Act cycle is an ongoing process where incremental improvement occurs with each completion of the cycle (Smylie, 2010). However, Smylie (2010) is quick to point out that the school improvement benefits will only be realized when the data collected and analyzed is converted into action.

Dodge Local teachers’ discussion about the improvement plan’s existence possessed a remarkable resemblance to the answers about the district vision, a random list of initiatives. There were several teachers who provided some details of what they perceived to be components important to the overall achievement in Dodge. However, these components did not align with the purpose or the framework for a strategic plan or an improvement plan. These individuals were not confident that any plan exists but were willing to share their priorities for areas of improvement in Dodge Local.

**Improvement Plan and Accountability**

Several teachers mentioned accountability demands as one of the critical pieces of the school improvement plan. Susan Miller referred to testing and graduation rate as important in the overall district picture as teachers are feeling the pressure associated
with them. Megan Kaple perceived the district rating component of the Local Report Card as essential to the overall district picture as evidenced by her commentary:

The excellent rating is huge and equipping the teachers to reach that. I think that’s great. We need to keep achieving that because it is definitely attainable, obviously, since we have been achieving it. I think the district’s goal is the rating. I think the district’s goal is to graduate kids ready with the skills for the world, for college, for whatever they need. It starts all the way up through. I think the district graduating whole learners is a big deal. I think the ratings and stuff are important, unfortunately, because that is all the community sees. Now, they are going to see the teacher ratings too. Equipping the teachers for that too because that is all the community sees.

Georgia Kelly also made a general comment about the district continuing to attain their Adequate Yearly Progress on the Local Report Card. These teachers all seemed to perceive that the accountability demands were important to district success and the overall district picture and therefore essential components of the school improvement plan.

Teachers perceived many of the accountability demands as components of the district improvement plan. Although the teachers were clearly lacking specific knowledge of an improvement plan, i.e., identifying specific goals and objectives, the vision of the district, and implementation strategies, they did pinpoint distinct initiatives in the district. The Dodge Local teachers all emphasized the value of focusing on the accountability demands. It was evident that they realized that there were expectations for teachers as they relate to student achievement on state tests. Not clearly identified as district goals, it can be postulated that accountability demands are de facto building level goals in Dodge Local.
Improvement Plan and Expectations

Two general comments about expectations were made about what Dodge Local is trying to accomplish. Heather Dean encouraged the district, “To continue the high success rate” as evidenced by their test scores. Heidi Seller was specific when she stated, “I think it is to be the best school in the state of Ohio” as she heard her superintendent mention this a few years ago at an in-service day event. Both teachers believed that the district is currently high achieving, which can be a powerful force to accomplish tasks in Dodge Local.

Once again, the Dodge Local teachers could not clearly define goals or implementation strategies in the school district related to an improvement plan. However, comments regarding the affects of accountability demands and the reaction of the district to the demands demonstrated a framework for future success. Heather Dean mentioned that the district should continue its high success rate suggesting an existing mission in the district, or the district’s current state. Heidi Seller’s comment about the district moving toward being the best district in the state of Ohio also implied the district vision. Thus, the components of an improvement plan are inherent in some of the Dodge Local teachers’ minds, but no concrete plan is identified.

Improvement Plan and Student Needs

Four teachers commented that Dodge Local is demanding that each student is educated as an individual. Wendy Mason explained, “Overall, we are trying to educate the students in [Dodge] and we are trying to do it in a way that is trying to help them as individuals.” Rose Burns described this individual instruction as, “It all boils down to guaranteeing that everyone is learning.” Melissa Rollins explained the individual
instruction responsibility as, “I think the district is trying to meet the needs of the students, but also taking into account the new laws and things being passed to be sure they are on the right track to achieve those goals.” Barbara Smith also mentioned the needs of kids when she stated, “I think that we are trying to teach every kid.” Each of these teachers perceived the responsibility of educating each student and meeting their individual needs as a critical component of the education process. In Dodge Local teachers consider each child an individual and have established that each student’s needs must be met and considered as a component of the school improvement plan.

Similar to the accountability initiatives and expectations, teacher discussion of student needs indicated that a similar focus exists in Dodge. The teachers remarked that students are considered individuals and their needs are identified and met as such. Thus, in order to meet the accountability demands that Dodge teachers mentioned as critical to district success, they are using individual student needs as an implementation strategy to achieve success. Meeting student needs is also a de facto implementation strategy for the Dodge Local district.

**Formal Improvement Planning**

Ironically, several teachers answered that an improvement plan in Dodge Local exists even though there appears to be no substantive evidence of specific goals, mission, or vision. Dodge Local teachers did not have specific knowledge of the plan. For instance, Wendy Mason answered, “Um, I think [student achievement] is always in the plan somewhere. I haven’t formally read it.” Allie Reckler provided a response that was even more indeterminate, “I think so, but I don’t know what it is.” In reference to a student achievement goal, Melissa Rollins believed that one might exist but was not
certain of it as she commented, “I think, at this point, we are working toward a student achievement goal from my understanding. I don’t know if it is necessarily set with all of the changes.” Megan Kaple even ridiculed herself for not knowing the plan as evidenced when she said, “I do not know. I am a bad teacher.” Although these teachers all indicated that an improvement plan exists with a student achievement goal, no one could provide any specifics about the plan or the goals.

Perhaps these are the educators who are providing the true picture of the improvement in Dodge; the improvement plan does not exist. However, the data suggest that there is some loose resemblance to an improvement as teachers alluded to goals, vision, mission, and implementation strategies. The improvement plan is necessary to provide the direction for the school district and answers the questions of what is happening now and where are we headed (Kruse & Louis, 2009). There was no evidence that anyone developed a plan as a committee, nor is there evidence that the plan is implemented or evaluated. Although there is no evidence of the existence of a physical improvement plan, it was clear that Dodge Local teachers do have some knowledge of where the district is headed and what some of the expectations are to accomplish the task at hand. A tangible improvement plan would provide the district additional consistency with teachers and clarity of future direction for effective instructional leadership.

Trust

Trust is often defined as being friendly, but it is more complex than simple friendship or friendliness (Zand, 1997). Tschannen-Moran (2004) described trust as including five core elements—benevolence, honesty, reliability, competence, and openness—and has asserted that trust among teachers is linked to higher student
achievement. Cosner (2009) further described collegial trust as the “regular interactions, coordination, and cooperation between various members of the organization for work to be completed and for organizational goals to be attained” (p. 251). Zand (1997) described trust as “a willingness to increase your vulnerability to another person whose behavior you cannot control, in a situation in which your potential benefit is much less than your potential loss if the other person abuses your vulnerability” (p. 91). Vulnerability means the possibility of being harmed or being embarrassed, having prolonged delays that waste time, creating the inability to do what was planned or potentially, loss of life (Zand, 1997). The benefits that can be realized from trust can include the completion of a job, attaining a goal, or a reward (Zand, 1997).

Zand (1997) described the elements of trust: information, influence, and control. When trust is present, leaders disclose information to others such as problems, goals, or intentions. A leader is trusting when he or she permits others to influence his or her decisions. Leaders also show trust when they depend on others as evidenced through delegation. These elements of trust can be reciprocal with the leader and another exercising these elements simultaneously. Thus, the leader and others can implement varying degrees of each of these elements at any time depending on the situation and the person involved.

Trust matters to individuals in school settings as it means that everyone is committed to making a good faith effort to follow-through on commitments or obligations to others (Cosner, 2009). Trust also encourages people to be open and to “recognize and use good ideas” (Zand, 1997, p. 97). Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2000) described trust as being necessary for effective cooperation and communication, thus
providing a foundation for a well-functioning organization. When trust exists in an organization, a leader realizes the benefits of access to knowledge and cooperation (Zand, 1997). When individuals in an organization trust one another, the decision quality and implementation of the decisions improves (Zand, 1997).

The facets of trust (benevolence, honesty, openness, reliability, competence) are relied upon in order to make trust judgments and set the overall tone for trust in schools (Tschannen-Moran, 2004). The sense of caring, or benevolence, to protect another’s well being can be accomplished by showing concern for employee needs and protecting workers’ rights (Tschannen-Moran, 2004; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000). Honesty, or truthful statements about what happened or maintaining commitments for the future, builds a sense of trust (Tschannen-Moran, 2004). Openness, which can be described as disclosing facts or intentions, is implemented when there is open, accurate, and proactive communication (Tschannen-Moran, 2004; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000). Another important element of trust is the ability to depend on another person consistently (Tschannen-Moran, 2004). Even when a person is well-intentioned, they may not be trusted unless there is a level of competence, or “the ability to perform a task as expected” (Tschannen-Moran, 2004, p. 30). Finally, when administrators share decision making with teachers, teacher satisfaction increases with their participation level (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000). Tschannen-Moran (2004) added that it is the responsibility of the leader in the school to take the “initiative to build and sustain trusting relationships” (p. 35). These facets can be exhibited to different degrees at different times depending on the situation, yet they are all vital to developing a culture of trust in the school building.
The teachers at the K-2 building perceived that trust existed between the teachers and the administrator in the building. They specifically referenced the trust facet of open communication, or openness, that they experience with the current administrator in charge. Wendy Mason said, “If there was something that I really wanted to talk to my principal about, I feel comfortable. Other people feel that they could too. They have that trust that they could confidently speak to administrators about anything.” Georgia Kelly also referenced the open communication style of the principal creating a trusting environment, “As far as administrators, our principal, when she is there which has been really hard these last couple years, she has been really open. At least she has been with me. I shouldn’t speak for everyone, but I think most people have that same feeling.” Melissa Rollins also shared this sentiment as she spoke about open communication, “I feel that [the principals] are very open and they want to help us. The communication there is very open and flexible. You feel like you are talking to a normal person and it is not very scary.” The K-2 teachers emphasized that the administrator established trust through effective use of open communication, or openness, trust facet.

In contrast, the teachers in the 3-4 building felt the exact opposite about trust. These educators believed there to be a lack of trust between teachers and administrators caused by several missing facets of trust. Barbara Smith discussed the lack of trust due to the lack of reliability of the administrator at the 3-4 building:

We struggled with trust with administrators this year because we were down [in number of administrators] and then we had two new [administrators]. It has been really hard on the staff…We have a building in Divide [township] and two other buildings in Dodge and we don’t see our principal because she is shared between all three buildings, very often. There is that perspective of not being able to walk into the office and say can I throw this idea off of you because they are just not around. That is not their fault. That is not our fault. It is just the way things are
right now. . . . So, we take care of a lot of things on our own, which again puts a lot of stress on teachers because they’re dealing with discipline problems.

Heather Dean also shared this sentiment about the 3-4 building mistrust caused by the lack of honesty and openness on the part of the administration:

There were so many secretive things going on this past year between staff and administrators. We talk as teachers all the time, but we felt that we were kept in the dark about all kinds of things this year. I mean I really have had a good teaching experience being at Dodge and would never trade it for anything, but this year, even the aides were saying that they didn’t know if they even wanted to be here anymore. I heard more people saying that than ever before. I was just like everybody was so frustrated and in the dark and we weren’t told things. We were once told if we needed to know, we would be told, otherwise we don’t need to know. We were very offended. Then the trust level dropped. Everybody afterward sat there and looked in awe and couldn’t believe that they didn’t want our input anymore.

Allie Reckler also perceived the lack of trust to be, in part, attributed to a lack of reliability, openness, and competence from the administrator:

Our administrator left two weeks before school started and we felt lost. The primary principal took over and she does three buildings which is impossible. Special ed took 90% of her time. They did some part-time pseudo-administrators, but my kids did not know this other person. I did not feel comfortable sending my kids to her. There was a lack of communication from all levels this year. It was really disappointing. There was a police officer who was brought into the building. His first day was the day of the Newtown shooting. The kids went home and said that there was an officer in our building. I got a lot of emails asking what was going on. Apparently they knew he was coming, as a school resource officer, but nobody indicated that to us or the parents. I questioned why we weren’t told. They told me to explain. I questioned if they wanted 20 different people explaining 20 different ways. So, a letter was sent home from the Superintendent. Another example is that our guidance counselor was asked to leave before the end of the school year. Again, we, the staff, were not told that she was to be gone. Nothing came from administration other than to tell the kids that she is okay and decided to retire. Feel free to answer questions for the kids. I emailed and said that I am not comfortable answering questions when I am not sure why she is gone. A letter went home from the principal. I was like you have to tell parents in this day and age with Twitter and FaceBook. You need to stop a rumor before it can ever get a chance to get started. To me those were two big areas that failed dramatically at communicating.
These three examples from teachers at the 3-4 building demonstrated the facets of trust that were missing in order to develop the teacher to administrator trust in the building. As reported by the teachers at the 3-4 building, they perceived that the lack of trust was due to the failure of the administrator to exhibit honesty, openness, reliability, and competence.

Trust can also be examined from the perspective of how it affects teachers as colleagues in the workplace. Although administrator behavior sets the overall tone in a building, teacher trust most directly impacts student learning (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000). Some facets of trust are more important in teachers' judgments of their colleagues than in administrator to teacher relationships (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000). Caring or supportive behaviors, benevolence, can lay a foundation for trust for teachers which can be expressed through socializing outside of school, covering classes, or caring for an ill colleague. Openness and honesty are also essential ingredients for trust among teachers. Teachers often share teaching strategies and materials to assist in student learning. Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2000) pointed out that once honesty has been violated among colleagues, it is difficult to regain. Dodge Local teachers had a positive view of trust between colleagues in the workplace.

Dodge Local is definitely a school that has teachers that exhibit caring or supportive behaviors, benevolence, to justify the high teacher trust. Rose Burns discussed a spiritual support that the teachers at Dodge provide for one another:

I think that just that willingness to share with one another and part of our team. Not to share things we are teaching, but share life experiences. We have a group that meets before school for prayer. I think that is a neat thing. Not everybody comes and that’s okay. Different teachers can come at any point and it is another piece where we come together. It is before school time and it is something that is
okay to have happen. There is that level of sharing and praying for one another. I think that helps to develop trust in all of us. It is a spiritual piece.

This spiritual sharing is a deep caring that develops teacher-to-teacher trust in Dodge.

Megan Kaple elaborated on social endeavors that celebrate friendships at Dodge:

If somebody wanted to know something, they would feel comfortable asking anyone for a favor... we don’t go out to lunch, so everyone is in the lounge every day. We share our lives outside of school as well. There are so many little relationships. I job shared with another teacher and she watched my kids and her daughters babysit my kids. Many of the teachers go out to dinner together. Several of us camp together. Also in a small community, there are so many connections beyond the classroom and there are friendships beyond the school walls and that helps. We do birthday buddies and monthly meals in the lounge and things that connect our staff.

It is apparent from Megan’s statement that the teachers like to spend time together socially and have built their trust reservoir from within the school walls. The benevolence facet of trust is clearly established among teaching colleagues in Dodge Local as their social and spiritual time together illustrated.

The teachers at Dodge Local are open and share materials and teaching strategies in order to improve student achievement and therefore build trust. This can be described as the openness facet of trust where they share important information among themselves (Tschannen-Moran, 2004). Wendy Mason explained this as she discussed how important sharing is:

It seems that we are trying to help each other out to give the best education to the students. Once they leave us, they are going to be somebody else’s anyway. Keeping something to yourself that you think is great teaching isn’t really good for the community of us as a group. If it is going to help kids, it is good to share when you can. I was used to not sharing anything at the middle school. I had to learn to share and be more open that way. That is how I guess that I know because people are more open in how we share things, knowledge, materials, or who has this?
Wendy understood the sense of sharing, openness, for the betterment of the whole, which increases teacher-to-teacher trust.

**Collaboration**

Since trust requires regular interaction between colleagues, it would stand to reason that collaboration might be a strong and identifiable component of schools with collegial trust. Collaboration can be defined as a leader using the “talents and resources of all members, not simply a single leader or executive team, to bring about change or generate creative and adaptive solutions (Hickman in Preedy, Bennett, & Wise, 2012, p. 67). However, teachers were initially “socialized to work solo in self-contained settings” (Collay, 2011, p. 110). Sharpe, Lounsbery, and Templin (1997) argued that collegiality and cooperation are necessary components of successful collaboration and “genuine cooperation and collegiality must include an active sense of equality among all participants” which is grander than just a state of liking one another (Sharpe, Lounsbery, & Templin, 1997, p. 218). Unfortunately, teachers often confuse the terms, collegiality and congeniality, and are not driven to like one another based on professional work or behavior, but rather like one another based on personal interests (Sharpe, Lounsbery, & Templin, 1997).

Collaborative efforts among teachers can be enhanced by the actions of the building leader. Collaboration requires “purposeful, focused time to talk about how to teach well, what to teach, and what the students know and don’t know” (Collay, 2011). Thus, a building leader can create the time and structure that allow for teacher professional collaboration (Tschannen-Moran, 2004). The principal can also foster
openness in the building by encouraging teachers to observe one another and provide feedback (Tschannen-Moran, 2004).

When true collaboration based on professional interests occurs, three levels of collaboration can exist among teachers: superficial collaboration, segmented collaboration, or instructional collaboration (Kise & Russell, 2008). Teachers have struggled to work at any one of these collaborative levels, as most collaboration between teachers is “contrived” and not deep or meaningful (Hargreaves & Dawes, 1990; Kise & Russell, 2008). These collaborative structures increase in complexity beginning with superficial collaboration, or meaningless decision making to instructional collaboration where teachers are engaged in teaching and learning conversations about their students (Kise & Russell, 2008). Table 5 depicts how these levels of collaborative behaviors exist on a continuum of complexity (Kise & Russell, 2008).

Table 5
Kise and Russell (2008) Collaborative Continuum

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Least Collaborative</th>
<th>to</th>
<th>Most</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level I: Superficial Collaboration</td>
<td>Level II: Segmented Collaboration</td>
<td>Level III: Instructional Collaboration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussing/teaming for decisions such as fundraising, field trips, resources, or interventions for students</td>
<td>Teachers engage in cross-disciplinary projects such as science experiments or essays. Team teaching where teachers divide the subjects they teach.</td>
<td>Teachers are resources for one another in discussions about teaching and learning to develop curriculum and lessons to meet the needs of all students.</td>
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The three types of collaboration suggest effective models for teachers to reflect concerning where their current collaboration state exists, and provide a launching point for teams to become more collaborative (Kise & Russell, 2008). Superficial
collaboration represents teachers completing administrative tasks, which involves minimal collaboration, as each task is discussed and marked as completed. Segmented collaboration involves more teacher collaborative behavior where teachers may create cross-disciplinary units or activities together. Finally, teachers should aspire to work at the instructional collaboration level where they discuss teaching and learning and are considered resources for one another in developing curriculum. Over time, any teaching team can reach Level III, or instructional collaboration, if they learn to interact accordingly.

In order to reach Level III instructional collaboration, there needs to be a “strong commitment to both the relationship and the task” (Tschannen-Moran, 2004). Thus, teachers build commitment to their relationship with colleagues and the task at hand by developing trust. Seeking out the facets of trust (benevolence, honesty, openness, reliability, and competence) are essential foundational components on which to build an instructional collaboration. In schools with greater trust, there is more quality collaboration (Tschannen-Moran, 2004).

When questioning Dodge Local teachers about their collaborative behaviors, they were overwhelmingly certain that a collaborative culture exists in Dodge. However, when examining their responses more closely and framing them within the context of the collaboration model provided by Kise and Russell (2008), their collaborative culture does not incorporate instructional integration suggesting that collaborative culture is less mature than it might seem.
A few teachers in Dodge provided examples of what they believed to be collaboration activities that occur within the school buildings. Melissa Rollins discussed how teachers share their practices with one another when she said,

We have the DLT and BLT leadership teams that meet and then they come and share back what they have learned and I think that’s a very good thing. . . . When I first stated I thought that I didn’t feel like I knew what was going on, but now teachers meet once or twice a week and they collaboratively get together, for instance kindergarten teachers get together, first grade teachers get together. We have a new schedule this year which will be a lot better because they can get together during their special times.

Melissa shared what she believed to be collaboration, but throughout her response, she just referred to the teachers meeting and never mentioned that the teachers had arrived at the point where they were sharing deep enduring understandings about curriculum. Her response indicated that the meetings seemed to discuss seemingly superficial topics (Level I), as did the response from Heather Sellers:

As far as working together, our grade level teams do well. In the kindergarten team, we especially mesh really well. . . . We are really good about sharing ideas and taking other people’s ideas. At the same time, if somebody shares and idea, most of the time, feelings don’t get hurt if somebody doesn’t think it is a good idea.

A similar answer was provided by Megan Kaple as she replied,

Yes, we work together all the time, even grade level to grade level. Actually I had several first grade teachers come to me at the beginning of the year asking what I have done with this child’s academics or behavior. We have a great building.

Even Susan Miller suggested that there is a level of comfort with colleagues but did not mention curricular practices:

I mean I definitely feel a bond with people. I mean there are always differences because people are people, but when push comes to shove, we will definitely stick together.
These teachers all provided examples of what they believed to be collaboration in Dodge Local. Some of these practices shared by teachers could register at Level I, superficial collaboration, but also seem to relate to congeniality, rather than collegiality.

Utilizing Kise and Russell’s (2008) collaboration continuum, the responses provided by Dodge Local teachers only exist at the lowest end of the model, superficial collaboration. The descriptions of collaborative behaviors were merely exercises in communication or rote task completion activities between teachers. Although positive and friendly communication is essential, it is not collaboration. Sharpe, Lounsbery, and Templin (1997) also referred to this practice as getting along or merely being congenial because colleagues are sharing a workplace together. Although very low level collaborative practice, the communication that exists in Dodge does assist in developing the culture of trust.

**Research Question Three: What Factors Do Teachers Perceive as Levers for Change in Their Own Instructional Leadership Practice?**

The implementation of beliefs, instructional skills, professional growth, decision making, and responsibility in Dodge Local were discussed and reviewed in research question one. Then, specific tenets of instructional leadership were explored including the district and school vision, improvement plan, and the overall trust and collaboration present in the district. In order to fully examine the perceptions of teachers’ instructional leadership practices and how accountability demands may affect them, it was necessary to investigate teacher experience with accountability demands, how accountability demands may have impacted instructional practice, and whether teachers perceive the accountability demands to be worth it.
Experience With Accountability Demands

Accountability refers to “a variety of formal and informal ways by which people in schools give an account of their actions to someone in a position of formal authority inside or outside the school” (Abelman & Elmore, 1999, p. 4). Abelman and Elmore (1999) explained that these actions can range from formal actions, such as legislation or policies, to informal actions, such as targeted communication or checklists. New accountability systems hold schools accountable for similar expectations for student performance regardless of their unique organizational characteristics and problems, their unique student populations and communities, and school academic history (Abelman & Elmore, 1999). Although schools in the United States are primarily guided by external accountability demands, internal accountability has been affected (King & Rohmer-Hirt, 2011).

External accountability demands result from legislation or requirements imposed outside the school district that typically results in serious consequences for failure to meet the statutory obligations (Poole, 2011). These external demands resulted from advocates who believed that education reform efforts were only based on ‘inputs’, such as facilities, textbooks, and remedial instruction, but failed to fully capture important educational outcomes for student learning (Kirby & Stecher, 2004). The new approaches to accountability are intended to make educators feel primary responsibility for student performance or results as a measure of their instructional efforts (Elmore & Fuhrman, 2001; Kirby & Stecher, 2004, p. 2). This shift from inputs to outputs requires more than just doing the same things differently; it requires new knowledge about instructional...
practice, new pedagogy about student learning, analysis of instructional time use, and school day organization (Elmore & Fuhrman, 2001).

The effectiveness of external accountability demands is dependent on several factors. State accountability policies and mandates, school status determines which policies apply to any particular building, and the rewards or sanctions imposed can determine the strength of the accountability mandates (Poole, 2011). Although these factors can impact the accountability effectiveness, there is conflicting evidence as to the actual impact of these factors on achievement. There is some evidence that stronger accountability systems do result in teachers having a better understanding of student needs; some teachers work harder and become more focused on school-wide goals and produce some effect on student achievement scores (Elmore & Fuhrman, 2001; Poole, 2011). Despite these positive findings, there is also evidence that suggests that stronger demands do not have an effect on student achievement and can impact teachers negatively as they feel a diminished sense of their professional value or worth (Poole, 2011).

In order to meet the external accountability demands, internal accountability demands are imposed in order to monitor achievement, progress and to determine the effectiveness of the changes, i.e., instructional practices, new knowledge and skills, pedagogy, and instructional materials (Elmore & Fuhrman, 2001; King & Rohmer-Hirt, 2011). Thus, internal accountability has created a need for districts to focus on “every child’s progression instead of old district averages, a more systemic approach to learning aligned with standards, and, in many districts, more meaningful strategic planning” (King & Rohmer-Hirt, 2011, p. 76). Internal accountability demands must also delineate a
system of consequences for not meeting expectations, as internal accountability directly affects the response to external accountability demands (Abelman & Elmore, 1999; Poole, 2011). Internal accountability demands are most likely successful if the school shares consensus on school mission, has clear standards for student performance, regularly collects information to inform themselves about their success, and exerts pressure among their peers to meet their goals (Poole, 2011).

**Internal and External Accountability**

Dodge Local teachers shared their experience with external accountability demands and did not share any experiences with internal accountability demands. This being the case, it would stand to reason that the internal accountability system in Dodge is weak or lacking completely. The absence of this system could prove to have dire results on the overall external accountability pictures as it indicates that the internal accountability system in Dodge is lacking, not aligned, nor focused toward a common goal (Elmore & Fuhrman, 2001). The internal accountability demands would most likely be identified in an improvement plan. Seeing as how it has been established that Dodge Local lacks a formal improvement plan, it would stand to reason that the internal accountability practices would be missing as well.

As indicated, Dodge Local teachers only shared their experience with the external, or statutory, accountability demands. The following external statutory accountability demands were mentioned by teachers (presented in order of most frequently mentioned to least frequently mentioned): Third Grade Reading Guarantee, Student Learning Objectives [four-way tie], Reading Improvement and Monitoring Plan, Ohio Teacher Evaluation System, Common Core State Standards, and Adequate Yearly
Progress/Annual Measurable Objectives [two-way tie], Partnership for Readiness College and Career, Value Added, and the Local Report Card. The teachers in Dodge mentioned that they had some experience with or knowledge of these accountability demands. However, it turned out that teachers’ knowledge base concerning details related to external accountability demands proved to be superficial at best.

The external accountability demands that were most frequently mentioned by the Dodge Local teachers (Third Grade Reading Guarantee, Student Learning Objectives, Reading Improvement and Monitoring Plan, Ohio Teacher Evaluation System, Common Core State Standards, and Annual Measureable Objectives/Adequate Yearly Progress) are all statutory demands that were implemented in school districts via legislative requirements during the past school year, with the exception of Adequate Yearly Progress. This may suggest that these accountability demands are fresh in the minds of teachers because of the large scale changes that have resulted from them over the course of the last year. These accountability demands alone can account for possible retention of students, additional trainings and certifications for teachers, public reporting of teacher competency in the classroom based on teaching and student growth, additional growth measures, and implementation of new curriculum in the classroom. These accountability demands impact teachers, personally, to the greatest extent of any imposed within the last 10 years. However, even though these accountability demands hit close to home for teachers and could possibly be life changing, resulting in the potential loss of employment, change of placement, or requirements for additional training, teachers remained ill-informed of the external accountability mandates.
Teachers provided token responses regarding the descriptions of and impact of external accountability demands and at times were completely inaccurate in their descriptions of the legislation. For instance, Allie Reckler mentioned several external accountability demands that she had experience with, but only listed the names of them. She was unable to provide any details about them as if she was reading them off the list and only recognized them by name:

Value added . . . I went to a conference years ago in Columbus when value added was just coming out. AYP . . . that has been on the table for years. Third Grade Guarantee . . . I am glad that I am in fourth grade. Student Learning Objectives . . . I guess we will find out more about them this year. OTES . . . I mean a lot of this is new, new, new.

Apparently, Allie knew these demands by name, but could not provide further information. Heidi Seller provided information that was nearly as vague as that provided by Allie:

I mean the Common Core State Standards, that is a huge one. We have gone through and broken them apart and mapped out the curriculum. . . . I haven’t had much experience with many of the other ones, but I know what they are. I just remember in college that they talked about AYP all the time and they knew it was coming. Student Learning Objectives we did a little bit last year and we are going to do that in August. Third Grade Guarantee scares me a little.

It was obvious that Heidi didn’t understand the external demands but mentioned that she “knew” what they were. Megan Kaple was misinformed about the external accountability demands:

Adequate yearly progress, I am not sure it is going to come into play and value added is not either. The Ohio Teacher Evaluation System will affect us a lot next year. At kindergarten some of these things, Third Grade Guarantee, Reading Improvement and Monitoring Plan are not going to affect us a whole lot, so maybe we are lucky.

The accountability demands that Megan mentioned are very much in place in the state, with adequate yearly progress being revised to annual measurable objectives. Along the
same lines, the Third Grade Guarantee and Reading Improvement and Monitoring Plan all begin at the kindergarten level, so there is misinformation if she truly believes that kindergarten does not have a role in these accountability stakes. Grace Small, a first-year Title I tutor was completely misinformed about the external demands that she spoke about:

The Student Learning Objectives if I remember right, those are the “I can” statements. A lot of these are familiar, but I don’t remember. Third Grade Guarantee is the third grade test that the students take for reading and math. If they do not pass the test, they do not pass to fourth grade and drastic things come into play. Local Report Card is published online. The state does them and you can look up and see the school district, but I have no idea what is on them. College and Career Readiness is at the high school level where colleges come in and talk to seniors about this is what you need to do, and these are the scores that you need to get. Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC), we have talked about it a lot, but I can’t tell you what it is.

Grace made a valiant effort of trying to explain the external accountability demands, but she was obviously making up or confusing information as many of her responses were erroneous.

Two of the Dodge Local teachers did provide more details about the external accountability demands than their peers. One is a Title I tutor in the building and is currently held responsible for all of the monitoring and Reading Improvement Plans that correlate with the Third Grade Reading Guarantee. The other is the teacher association president who is active with the state education association, current bargaining language and association rights. Georgia Kelly, a Title I tutor, specifically described her experience with Reading Improvement and Monitoring Plans (RIMPs) and Student Learning Objectives (SLOs) as she explained:

The RIMPS, improvement plans, were big because Title [tutors] were required to initially assess, determine interventions, write them, keep them, and keep track of them. Doing that all under the gun and not feeling like we knew what we were
doing. There were no examples of what these should look like and how these should be done. . . . The SLOs, we don’t have those completed yet. We have one written, but we still have reading to do. I think they are a waste of time. I just don’t think that you can take one specific objective to grade one whole year’s experience with a child. I think the amount of time and effort to write them, record them, and test them throughout the year is going to take away from some really good instructional time. Adequate yearly progress, we know plenty about that, but we don’t deal with that at our building yet because we are K-2.

Georgia’s responses, although not perfect, nor flawlessly detailed, were much more descriptive than her peers indicating that she has some command of external accountability demands. Barbara Smith, the association president and special education teacher, also shared knowledge of external accountability demands indicating that she was the other teacher most informed of those interviewed in Dodge as she remarked:

_No Child Left Behind_ has many great ideas, but logically trying to incorporate them into the classroom and we want to address each individual child. I think there are some children who will struggle to make progress and get them to where they need to be. Value added, I have dealt with a little bit. It will be important in the future with teacher evaluations and stuff and we need to look at it more. Being special education, it has not driven my teaching, but this will probably drive me a little bit more. Annual Measurable Objectives, Ohio Teacher Evaluation System, Student Growth Measures all go in together and are going to start making more of a difference. Third Grade Guarantee, I had third and fourth grade this year and that is part of the reason that I am going to fifth and sixth grade next year because I do not have my reading endorsement. I still wonder if they are going to change this. I think it is a great concept as far as we can make progress and have teachers, I just think it wasn’t thought out by the state. Reading Improvement Plans came along with the Third Grade Guarantee and made each student have something like an Individual Education Plan (IEP). If a student is not passing, we need to understand why they are not passing and what we need to do to get them there. Local Report Cards, we are definitely aware of these and where we get our scores. I think it drives our [District Leadership Team], where were are low and what we need to make progress in. College and Career Readiness is just making sure that all students are ready for college or a career. I know that’s something at the high school, but it does start at kindergarten now and works its way through. It’s collaborating and making sure all skills are being taught. Common Core is the new standards.
Reading through Barbara’s responses to external accountability, it was apparent that she does have familiarity with more demands with her peers, as well as a deeper level of understanding than her Dodge Local peers.

The list of current external statutory accountability demands is lengthy. The teachers in Dodge Local are struggling to understand some of the most critical and overarching demands that are essential to comprehend in order to merit success. A basic grasp of the Local Report Card and the accountability measures that affect school progress and improvement are essential to merit any success. Elmore (2010) discussed the critical relationship between external and internal accountability demands and the fact that none of the external accountability will be effective until the internal system is established. Elmore went on to explain that the external accountability is essential to get the attention of the organization, but you can’t produce results with the external accountability measure by itself; the internal accountability factor is essential for outcomes (Elmore, 2010). Without a clear understanding of external demands, it would serve to reason that a defined internal accountability system would not be possible, which could indicate why Dodge Local teachers did not mention internal accountability measures present in the school district.

**Accountability Demands and Instructional Practice**

As demonstrated, Dodge Local teachers did not have an appreciable understanding of external accountability demands. However, through their dialogue they did mention a handful of the most recently imposed demands that are currently impacting them in their classrooms.
The Common Core State Standards which were required to be implemented by state law this school year (2013-2014) was the most pressing, yet positive, external accountability concern as explained by Dodge Local teachers. Eight of the 11 teachers interviewed mentioned the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and the appreciable positive impact that these new standards will make on their instructional practices. The change with the new standards has afforded teachers the ability to focus on standards and curriculum in depth giving them more confidence in what they should be teaching. For instance, Wendy Mason shared her positive take on the new standards as she stated, “I think the CCSS have changed [my instructional practices] in a positive way. . . . We know more of what we are responsible for teaching so the kids have a good foundation before they move on.” Rose Burns continued this thought with her positive stance on the CCSS and how they have prepared to implement them in the classroom:

Having the CCSS is going to make [instruction] easier because that is what we have to teach. We have broken those [standards] down and we know what we are teaching. I think it makes it easier to teach when you know what you are teaching. I think that is definitely a piece that is a good thing. It was a lot of work to implement it and bring it in and change our actual report cards. The work is done. It was difficult, but it will make it easier and improve my instruction.

Heather Dean also emphasized that the CCSS has “made [teachers] organized and organized our teaching. It has made us look deeply into our teaching and what is not necessary.” Heather’s response indicated that the CCSS has re-focused teachers on what is important in their instructional choices. Allie Reckler agreed with the CCSS making instruction more streamlined, but she emphasized that “None of the changes have changed her methodology in the classroom.” She believed that the CCSS might be another passing trend as she stated, “Being here 20 years, this [the CCSS] too shall pass.”
Consistent with her other replies, Allie didn’t hesitate to find something negative about the very topic that she states will assist her instruction.

In addition to the CCSS being a positive influence on instruction in the classroom, teachers also mentioned that the Student Learning Objectives, or SLOs, RIMP plans, and Student Growth measures are improving their instruction. Teachers believe that the SLOs assist them in focusing their instruction. Melissa Rollins commented, “I think once SLOs are done, they will be beneficial because they will tell us where a student needs to be.” Susan Miller also perceived that the SLOs are a positive influence on her instruction, but she only described SLOs as having improved instruction, as well as it being a lot of work upfront. Susan’s understanding of SLOs appeared to be limited as she could not explain how or why they would improve her instructional practice.

Teachers from Dodge Local have limited understandings of the other external accountability demands that they conclude have improved their instructional practice. Heidi Sellers listed Reading Improvement and Monitoring Plans (RIMPs) and Student Growth Measures (SGM) as “making life easier even though they are more work because I know where we are going is better.” Once again, it appeared that Dodge Local teachers can use the current buzzwords in education to a superficial degree, not necessarily understanding the true purpose of the accountability initiative.

When Dodge Local teachers were asked to consider the other perspective, or how the external accountability demands have negatively impacted their instruction, teachers focused on the time and stress. Wendy Mason shared that the waiting for the external accountability demands to be fully rolled out is frustrating. She said,

Waiting for the questions from Partnership for Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) has negatively impacted me. We need to teach kids ways to answer
questions. Knowing the content isn’t enough anymore because knowing the process of how to figure it out also impacts your teaching.

Georgia Kelly explained that the external accountability demands take time away from instruction when she stated,

Reading Improvement and Monitoring Plans take too much instructional time for one skill. The Third Grade Reading Guarantee also takes away from our instructional mindset and instructional time. Many of these accountability demands are taking the focus off of learning and instruction; it is very frustrating.

Barbara Smith described the time to prepare for these changes has robbed them of time in the classroom. Barbara shared, “[The accountability demands are just so time-consuming that I have been dealing with these things instead of being in the classroom.” To these Dodge Local teachers, time is of the essence.

According to the Dodge Local teachers, stress was a main negative result of the implementation of the new accountability demands. Wendy Mason was worried that her teacher evaluation could be impacted from the results of one day of testing and its impact on her student growth factor of her evaluation. Rose Burns felt hopeless as she was consumed by the work and stress of the new demands. She even threw her hands in the air when she questioned, “I keep wondering if something has to give.” Heather Dean focused on the stress associated with testing. Heather described, “A negative is all the stress. The testing bothers me terribly. Everything is geared toward testing.” Susan Miller also contributed her two cents to the negative side as she described the “Third Grade Reading Guarantee situation was very stressful. It took days for the [teachers] to figure out what to do.” It was apparent that the teachers perceive the accountability demands to affect them negatively in the areas related to time and stress, which are two areas that could be addressed by instructional leadership.
Although there were many negatives shared by the Dodge Local Teachers regarding the accountability demands, there were two teachers who appeared as outliers in their responses. These two teachers perceived there to be no negatives associated with the accountability demands. Melissa Rollins insisted, “All of [the demands] are for the right reasons and to make teachers better.” Grace Small shared her positive sentiment as she asserted,

Nothing on the [accountability] list negatively impacted me. You are a teacher for the child first. The extra requirements don’t matter. I can see that the Third Grade Reading Guarantee is negative for some people because it takes a lot of instructional time and you lose hands-on time. But, a good teacher works on balancing that and the professional field with student needs.

This perspective is quite profound for a first-year teacher.

Districts are required to implement these accountability demands. However, in light of preponderance of negatives that teachers perceived to be associated with their implementation, it stands to reason that teachers considered whether the time and stress associated with the demands will be worth it in the end. The Dodge Local teachers were on various points along the continuum, with four teachers providing a negative response, four teachers uncertain, and three teachers confirming the positive change that will result from these accountability demands.

With the recent wave of accountability legislation and pressures that would affect the teachers in the 3-4 building being studied, it is interesting to note, that these teachers did not stand out as answering this questioning differently than their peers. The Third Grade Reading Guarantee mandates in regards to licensure demands for teachers, remediation and intervention for students, and ultimately resulting in retention in some cases, could prove to be the ultimate in stress for teachers at this grade level. However,
no one teacher pointed out this fact during conversation. The inherent pressures that accompany this legislation alone with student monitoring and teacher professional development could impact teachers to a great extent individually.

Teachers who perceived the accountability demands as never being worth their time and effort listed specific reasons for refuting them. Wendy Mason shared the lack of examining details with regard to the demands,

I think there are too many variables [in the demands to be worth it]. Sometimes [the scores from accountability] looks like very good math or very good accounting. It doesn’t take into account what is going on in our classrooms. The people who know what is going on in our classrooms is students and even parents. I am not sure why it has come to this. I think it is what is important to somebody else.

Allie Reckler also agreed with the accountability demands being superficial and not emphasizing the important aspects of teaching and learning as she stated, “Maybe [the State] will be able to show you a piece of paper to show you how good I am, but if the kids aren’t enjoying learning and aren’t motivated, it doesn’t matter.” This perspective emphasized that affective learning goals are considered more valuable than other goals related to teaching and learning. Georgia Kelly reflected on the deficit that she believed to be inherent in the process itself, “I don’t think [the demands are worth it], until [the State] gets a better way to assess, not a one shot deal. [The State] needs to help our students be readers.” Heidi Sellers also shared flaws in the State process for accountability:

I think they are going in the right direction, but don’t have the right path. I think there needs to be more accountability in education. At the same time, I think they are splitting things out and not looking at the ramifications of them. I think [the State] is going to be highly disappointed when they see that [the accountability system implemented] doesn’t make a difference.
Four Dodge Local teachers perceived that the accountability demands has some merit and could be worth the effort. Grace Small suggested that the Ohio Teacher Evaluation System might be the only accountability demand that holds merit as being worthwhile. She believed that the teacher reflection inherent in the process could help teachers get better. Heather Dean also believed that the accountability demands could have merit in the end, but non-educators were limiting their potential. She described this discrepancy:

I think some changes can be good. I think there are just so many of them that they have thrown them at us. It is getting to a point where you don’t believe it. Non-educators making decisions and never having a classroom should listen to us [educators] please. That is why it is frustrating, as I am always defending the teaching career.

Barbara believed the accountability changes are challenging teachers in new ways:

The changes aren’t negative, but are making things more difficult now as an educator. I am trying to learn the changes and get my head around them so I can focus on instruction. I think teachers should be held accountable.

Finally, Susan Miller’s outlook on the accountability demands depends on the longevity of their existence. She explained,

It depends if [the legislature] keeps [the accountability demands] around. Consistency is the key. If [the legislature] continues to change things, it doesn’t create an environment of trust or security. If [the legislature] keeps them around, I am sure it will be beneficial. Accountability is important and I stress that with my kids. I expect them to be accountable too.

These educators are experiencing doubts but provide some reasoning as to why they are optimistic about the accountability demands or pessimistic about them.

The final three Dodge Local teachers believed that the accountability demands would be worth the time and effort. Rose Burns argued that if all students are College and Career ready as a result of implementation of the accountability demands, then all the
work would be worthwhile. Melissa Rollins was also positive regarding the outcome of the demands as she emphasized, “I think everything has a reason. I think it is good to keep the good teachers and good to be sure that students are being met adequately. I just feel that it has been thrown at us at one time with no direction.” Although Melissa was positive regarding the outcomes from the accountability demands there was still some bitterness toward the amount of demands required to be implemented in the district. Megan Kaple also believed the accountability demands are making a statement. She assured the researcher that because of the implementation of the demands, “The kids are reading better. They are writing better. Their math skills are more in-depth.” It appears that Dodge Local has a few advocates for the external accountability demands required of the school district.

**Summary of Results**

This study sought to examine teacher perceptions of teacher instructional leadership within a K-2 and a 3-4 building as a result of increased statutory accountability demands. This study sought to result in a description of the teacher perceptions of changes in their own instructional leadership practice as a result of increased accountability. The data for the study were collected via interview questions with participants in the Dodge Local School District. In this chapter, the data were presented and analyzed in the context of the three research questions.

The data analyzed from the Dodge Local School District indicated that teacher instructional leadership did not change to a great degree as a result of statutory accountability demands. The teachers in Dodge Local were compliant and implemented the mandated accountability demands. However, the teachers continued to proceed
instructionally as they always have with changes just related to content as presented in
the new Common Core Standards. The random activities that teachers engaged in at
Dodge Local could be linked superficially to instructional leadership capacity
characteristics. Incidentally, when examined more closely, it appeared that the Dodge
Local teachers are engaged in an uncoordinated set of initiatives with no real end in mind.
Thus, the Dodge Local teachers are not following a prescribed set of initiatives to
improve student achievement. Rather, these teachers are trying to tread water in a sea of
state initiatives of which they have no real understanding. Thus, instead of their time
being spent on the betterment of teaching and learning, they are dealing with stress and
lack of time because they are trapped in a maze of accountability initiatives with no clear
grasp of the goal.
CHAPTER V
SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

The purpose of this descriptive study was to examine teacher perceptions of their own instructional leadership within a K-2 and a 3-4 building as a result of increased statutory accountability demands. More specifically, this study gathered information and data related to the instructional leadership present in the Dodge Local School District. The information presented, as well as the data collected and analyzed, is intended to enhance the knowledge-base concerning instructional leadership. This chapter begins with a summary of the research and theory describing quality instructional leadership practices and statutory accountability demands which provides the theoretical framework for the study. Then, a summary of the study is provided. The findings are then interpreted and related to prior research. Finally, the chapter ends with recommendations and suggestions for further research.

Summary of Research and Theory

America’s educational system has been under fire for over 30 years as policy makers and legislators question the level of quality that the system provides to the students it serves. Legislators have mandated a series of reforms in order to establish accountability parameters for school districts. Legislation such as No Child Left Behind and the pending reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act was established to require schools to focus on student learning standards and to reward
success in order to improve student achievement. In order to accomplish this, schools needed to establish strategies to improve their current educational and instructional practices. Thus, an instructional leader in a school district needs to be focused on developing, implementing, and refining the improvement strategies and therefore improving student achievement.

In order to move forward with improvement efforts in a school district, McLaughlin (1993) asserted that an improvement plan affords a district an opportunity for aligned goals, strategies and actions, which could ultimately result in reflection, feedback, and better problem solving leading to student achievement. The plan, once established, can answer the questions of “what we are doing” and “where we are going” (Kruse & Louis, 2009). The Shewhart Cycle was the first strategy used for development of an improvement plan and included the components of Plan, Do, Act, Check (Smylie, 2010). Over the course of time, Shewhart’s improvement plan cycle was elaborated upon to further explain each step in detail. The additions included the elements of clarifying the vision, determining the difference between vision and values, setting goals and establishing strategies to meet the goals, implementing the plan, and assessing the outcomes of the plan (Smylie, 2010).

In light of the conflicting research as to whether school improvement plans are effective in improving student achievement, Fernandez (2011) asserted that the production of a plan does not mean that the plan will support intended results. Rather, his focus was on the quality of the plan as a key component in school improvement. As a result of his research, he concluded that a quality school improvement plan must have attainable, specific and timely goals; schools must have indicators related to
implementation that describe how professional development will be sustained through the process; and schools must also have a detailed plan of assessment of outcomes that includes monitoring processes. Although these factors are identified as components that lend themselves to positive school achievement results, it must be stated that additional factors present in the school could also influence the results, i.e., school climate, effectiveness of implementation. Thus, Fernandez (2011) concluded that a quality school improvement plan represents at least one of the attributes that may affect positive school performance.

In response to national goals, state-level legislation was enacted that requires districts to focus on measures of external accountability, or those demands or policies set outside of the school district (Poole, 2011). In recent years, external accountability demands have been numerous. Some of these accountability initiatives required via legislation include Annual Measurable Objectives (previously called Adequate Yearly Progress), Value Added, Student Learning Objectives, Ohio Teacher Evaluation System, Performance Index, and the Common Core Standards. The list provided is a sampling of some of the external accountability demands, most of which have been imposed within the last 10 years. If a district or school does not meet the expectations inherent in the external accountability demands, the school or district can face dire consequences such as district restructuring, personnel changes, and even district closure or takeover (No Child Left Behind [NCLB], 2003; Poole, 2011). In order to meet the demands of these external measures, a school or school district must implement an effective internal accountability system.
An effective internal accountability system in a school is necessary as internal accountability efforts directly affect the school’s response to external accountability policies (Poole, 2011). Internal accountability includes efforts inside the school to ensure consistency with respect to beliefs, values, and norms, as well as consensus on the school mission and the standards set for student achievement (Abelman & Elmore, 1999; Poole, 2011). Internal accountability must also include performance measures to ensure that everyone is fulfilling their responsibilities.

The work of Abelman and Elmore (1999) laid the foundational theory that school accountability grows out of the combination of three factors: individual conceptions of responsibility, shared expectations among school staff, and internal and external accountability mechanisms. An individual’s responsibility, according to Abelman and Elmore, arises from their own values and beliefs, but may be influenced by organizational and external influences. Expectations are collective in nature and may be shared by any particular group in a school, but expectations can vary from one group to another within the same structure. Accountability measures can be formal or informal and are created for individuals to be accountable to someone inside or outside of the school. Abelman and Elmore (1999) described the fact that school personnel have taken individual responsibility and collective expectations and have created their own internal accountability systems out of these components. When schools create internal accountability systems, there may still be no formal internal means of holding teachers accountable; but these collective expectations become their ruler for measuring success. When teachers’ personal responsibility is aligned with collective expectations of other school personnel, teachers recognize that consequences exist if the expectations
established by a superior are not met. In other words, in schools like the one described, schools create their own informal internal accountability systems.

Through their work, Abelman and Elmore (1999) confirmed that schools’ internal accountability systems were “tacit, unarticulated, informal, and grew more from the individual beliefs and values of teachers and administrations as enacted in their daily practice than from formal or explicit agreements” (p. 38). Thus, they suggested that schools are more likely to create their own informal internal accountability systems based on their own responsibility and expectations, rather than having a formal system in place. Nonetheless, the teachers operate in these informal internal accountability systems with the notion that the consequences of not meeting the expectations of their superiors is nonnegotiable and not meeting the formal external accountability as a result can be dire.

When examining new accountability mandates, research shows that the high-stakes associated with the external demands are not enough to ensure that districts create strong internal systems to ensure their success (Poole, 2011). Thus, the successful implementation is dependent on quality instructional leadership in any school or district. Instructional leadership, according to Robinson (2010) “refers to those sets of leadership practices that involve the planning, evaluation, coordination, and improvement of teaching and learning” (p. 2). These practices are all focused on the improvement of student achievement and progress. Specifically, McEwan (2003) pointed out that an effective instructional leader assesses a given situation and applies the appropriate set of leadership skills to the task at hand, i.e., time management, coordination, applying learning theory, knowledge of curriculum and instruction, implementing and assessing goals. Instructional leaders also emphasize the importance of analyzing data through
time for effective team collaboration is essential for success (Murphy et al., 2007). The roles and responsibilities of instructional leaders are lofty, thus instructional leadership must be shared in a school district. Research suggests that teachers most directly impact student achievement; teachers must assume some instructional leadership responsibility (Fancera & Bliss, 2011; Helterbran, 2010; Southworth, 2002; Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008).

The instructional leadership role of a teacher contains multiple facets. By definition, a teacher instructional leader must collaborate, be involved in decision making, maintain a focus on student learning, and share his/her teaching and learning expertise with others (Angelle & DeHart, 2011; Firestone & Martinez, 2007; Kurtz, 2009). However, not all teachers can simply assume the role of instructional leader; they must first establish credibility with their colleagues by demonstrating their accomplishments with teaching and learning in the classroom, as well as demonstrating that they can work collaboratively to impart change (Angelle & DeHart, 2011; Nolan & Palazzolo, 2011). The effectiveness of teacher leadership can vary accordingly with years of experience and their reaction to change (Angelle & DeHart, 2011; Waugh & Punch, 1987).

The works of Angelle and DeHart (2011) and Nolan and Palazzolo (2011) provided a theoretical framework related to the extent of teacher leadership in a school based on years of experience. Angelle and DeHart (2011) concluded that teachers with less experience were more likely than their more experienced peers to be willing to share pedagogical or classroom management knowledge with fellow teachers. They also determined that teachers with less experience were more willing and content to arrive early or stay late after school to benefit their peers, administrators, or teachers. Nolan
and Palazzolo (2011) reported that novice teachers believed that involvement in leadership for advancement activities (committee memberships, implementing curricular innovations, volunteering their time to assist the school, and involvement with parent groups) was essential for their professional careers. Nolan and Palazzolo (2011) concluded that novice teachers are more “involved in decisions related to curriculum, teaching, and textbooks than they are with decisions related to spending priorities, hiring, and designing facilities” (p. 314). Both studies indicated that novice teachers tend to perceive teacher leadership as an important aspect of their job. However, the novice teachers were inclined to assist with decisions and collaborations involving items such as curriculum, which are less adversarial, suggesting that the leadership roles they assume may be limited.

In looking to examine teachers’ perceptions of the changes to instructional leadership as a result of accountability demands, a study by Waugh and Punch (1987) on teachers’ reaction to change is a valuable tool. In this study, Waugh and Punch determined that changes that oppose teachers’ basic beliefs, philosophies, or values were not well received. When teachers were provided the opportunity to discuss potential changes and have a better understanding of its purpose and effect, uncertainty can be alleviated, increasing receptivity to the change. Teachers also examined the cost benefit of changes; if the extra time and effort exerted to implement the change will exceed the benefit from it, they are less likely to support the change. Finally, Waugh and Punch (1987) concluded that teachers were more receptive to change if they believed the change to be positive from the onset, as well as receiving necessary support from school leadership and colleagues.
In order for changes to occur, there needs to be a degree of trust established in the school or district. The cooperation and communication, as well as decision quality and implementation of decisions, received from leaders and colleagues is most effective when there is mutual trust established in the school or district (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000; Zand, 1997). Expanding on this idea, Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2000) described trust as being necessary for effective cooperation and communication, thus providing a foundation for a well-functioning organization. The lack of trust can be a detriment to reforms in schools, as teachers must trust their students, administrators and teachers must trust one another, and teachers must trust teachers in order to make lasting changes as a result of collaborative efforts (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2004).

Tschannen-Moran (2004) emphasized that trust is related to higher student achievement. Trust, as referenced by Tschannen-Moran (2004) includes five facets that must be relied upon to make critical judgments and to establish the tone for the trust in a school. The facets of benevolence, honesty, openness, reliability, and competence can be exhibited to different degrees at any one time but are critical to developing the culture of trust in the school building. The degree of trust between any two parties is dependent on who is being trusted and the nature of the interdependence between the parties (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000). Thus, trust levels can change depending on one’s disposition to trust, moods and emotions, values and attitudes, calculative motives, institutional support of trust, and knowledge of the other person (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000).

Research on the impact of trust in regards to relationships has been challenging as it is a complex process and is difficult to isolate. A study by Gambetta (1988) suggested
that trust in relationships develops over time. Thus, as an employee and employer begin
to know one another better and greater understanding, empathy and therefore, trust grows
stronger if the relationship is positive. Gabarro (1978) elaborated on this work by
studying the differentiation in trust over time between employer and employee. After an
initial impression, there is a period of exploration and then testing the limits of trust.
Then, based on the results of the testing, a stable trust environment develops, whether
positive or negative. Employees see superiors as more trustworthy when
“communication is accurate and forthcoming” (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000, p. 571).
Roberts and O’Reilly (1974) also found that when high levels of trust between superiors
and subordinates existed, the subordinates had a high degree of confidence and accuracy
in the information initiated by the superior, as well as a desire to interact with the
superior. Tschannen-Moran & Hoy (2000) summarized the benefits of trust in schools as
“trust facilitates productivity, and its absence impedes progress” (p. 585).

Summary of the Study

Over the past 10 years, legislation has been passed in reaction to a growing
concern over achievement in schools in the United States. A Nation at Risk report was
issued in the 1990s to itemize the deficits in America’s education system. Most recently,
No Child Left Behind was passed in 2001 ramping up the statutory accountability
demands for schools. Schools were now rated on their achievement efforts with students
as a result of the legislation. This new rating system created a sense of urgency in
schools to become more accountable for their actions in regards to student achievement.
Schools have answered the call in regards to accountability, as the 2011 Local Report
Card in Ohio demonstrated that 352 public districts have achieved the excellent or
excellent with distinction rating out of a total of 611 public school districts in Ohio. Fifty-eight percent of districts have achieved Ohio’s top two rankings of excellence. In 2012, the federal government approved waivers to some of the provisions in the *No Child Left Behind* legislation in order to afford states more flexibility in improving student achievement. Ohio applied for a waiver and was granted a waiver in 2012. This waiver changed the accountability measures in Ohio to attempt to meet student achievement demands, as the current Local Report Card measures seemed to inflate student achievement.

School districts in the state of Ohio have reacted to the legislative waiver by working to improve their student achievement and complying with the new demands inherent in the waiver. Schools that have always been designated as excellent, according to the Local Report Card are facing new accountability challenges. As the components of the new Local Report Card are rolled out over the next three years, the theory is that the true picture of student achievement and progress will be illuminated.

This study aimed to focus on a school district in Ohio that has always received an excellent rating. The perceptions of the teachers in regards to their views of instructional leadership and the changes to their instruction as a result of the accountability demands were studied in order to determine the impact of the changes. The review of literature indicated that instructional leadership practices are the key to improving student achievement. This instructional leadership must be shared across teachers and administrators to accomplish the accountability task. Although all individuals can impact achievement in a school district, the teachers are the key figures in directly affecting the achievement of students. Teacher implementation of instructional reform can be
impacted with their outlook on change, years of service, trust, collaboration, and their instructional responsibility. The review of the literature suggested that quality instructional leadership can impact student achievement. This study focused on the perceptions of teachers in regards to their views of instructional leadership and the impact of their accountability demands on instruction.

The research utilized a qualitative methodology regarding teacher perceptions of instructional leadership practice as a result of increased accountability demands. Data were gathered through interviews with the 11 elementary teachers of the Dodge Local School District. The teachers interviewed included eight teachers from the K-2 building and three teachers from the 3-4 building. Face-to-face interviews, lasting 45 minutes to 60 minutes, afforded the researcher the necessary time to ask a prescribed set of open-ended questions and probes to each participant.

Three research questions were developed to address the problems posed for the study. Research question one focused on how teachers in the study describe their own instructional practices. Teachers were asked questions regarding their instructional leadership beliefs and skills. Along with these essential components of instructional leadership, participants were also questioned about their involvement in decision making in the school. Finally, the interview focused on their responsibility for learning; more specifically, they were asked for what they are responsibility, to whom they are responsible, how they are responsible, and what happens if they do not fulfill their responsibilities. These questions probed teachers for their current state of instructional practice.
Research question two focused on how teachers describe their own capacity for instructional leadership. Their capacity focused on the current environment of the school, as well as their own abilities. The interview questions posed to the teachers considered the district vision, shared leadership, trust, and collaboration. These components are necessary for the culture of the school to thrive. The degree of their presence would influence the ability to make changes in the school.

The final research question, number three, focused on the factors that teachers perceive as levers for change in their own instructional practice. Thus, teachers were questioned about the accountability demands and the positive and negative effects, if any, of them on their instructional practices. This information gathered from the teachers detailed the teachers’ instructional practices as a result of the accountability demands.

The researcher met with each teacher in a mutually agreed upon location to conduct the interviews. Over the course of an hour, the teachers were interviewed asking the prescribed set of questions and probes as necessary. Each interview was recorded on a digital audio recorder. After the interviews, the researcher listened to the audio recordings of the interview and transcribed the interview verbatim in a word processing document. Each document was individually named to note the participant, date, and time of the interview.

After transcribing the data, the researcher initially applied a basic set of three codes, as suggested by Smagorinsky (2008). These codes were aligned with the research presented in the literature review and included the following topics: instructional leadership practices, instructional leadership capacity, and instructional leadership demands. As the researcher continued to read, code, and reread the data, additional codes
emerged from the thinking of the participants in the research. Some of these codes included instructional leadership beliefs, instructional leadership skills, and instructional leadership responsibility that helped to further describe instructional leadership practices. Instructional leadership vision, trust, and collaboration helped to further clarify instructional leadership capacity. Instructional leadership demands were defined in terms of positive and negative results of accountability and changes as a result of its implementation. The researcher updated the codebook to clarify how each code was being used, including examples and non-examples as adapted by Spickard-Prettyman (personal communication, November 2010). After all transcripts were coded, the researcher organized all like-coded phrases into spreadsheets and sorted items in order to find trends, similarities, and differences. Like data were then synthesized to answer the research questions presented using data from all sources interviewed.

Summary of Findings

The interview data collected throughout the study were summarized in Chapter IV. Individual teacher responses in regards to each of the research questions as they related to instructional leadership practices, instructional leadership capacity, and levers for change in regards to instructional leadership in an era of accountability were provided.

Findings for Research Question One: How Do Teachers Describe Their Own Instructional Leadership Practice?

The literature described several characteristics, which are necessary for effective instructional leadership practice. Robinson (2010) asserted that effective instructional
leadership includes knowledge of content, the ability to solve problems, and interpersonal trust. The combination of these factors impacts student achievement. Thus, teachers must possess instructional beliefs, instructional skills, and be involved in instructional decision making. The knowledge that a teacher possesses in the areas of curriculum, instruction, and assessment assists the school in moving forward with school improvement (McEwan, 2003). Teachers must also participate in decision-making in order to direct the activities of the school (Kurtz, 2009). Teacher knowledge and decision-making ability lends itself to teacher responsibility, which is personal according to each teacher’s values and beliefs (Abelman & Elmore, 1999). The responsibility of each teacher focuses on what is needed to improve student achievement (Fulmer, 2006). Teachers must be held accountable for their actions and whether they are meeting expectations (Abelman & Elmore, 1999). Dodge Local teachers exhibited differences between novice and veteran teacher perceptions of their beliefs, skills, decision making and responsibilities for learning.

The research shows that the instructional beliefs of teachers can vary by years of teaching experience. Dodge Local teachers with 12 years or less of experience explained the constructs of attitude, expectations, engagement and relationships as critical components of their students’ achievement. These factors would support Georgiou’s (2008) work, which concludes that novice teachers are more inclined to emphasize beliefs that can be controlled, such as teacher effort. Thus, less experienced teachers in the research and in Dodge tend to believe that the teacher’s efforts in engaging the students and setting expectation levels can impact student achievement (Georgiou, 2008).
Georgiou (2008) also stated that experienced teachers tend to focus on traits in students, which cannot be controlled, such as intellectual ability, gender, and family background as key components in determining student success. Although the Dodge Local teachers did not mention any of these specific traits, they also did not include any of the controlled beliefs described by their less experienced peers. The discrepancy between the novice and veteran teachers has been described by researchers as including unrealistic beliefs that novice teachers have when they start teaching. Weinstein (1988) explained that impacting student lives can be more difficult than novice teachers at first expect. Buckman (2003) also expanded on this idea as he states that young teachers believe that anything is possible if they make a concerted effort. Most likely, the truth lies somewhere in the middle.

Research indicated that student achievement is affected by depth of teacher content knowledge and the quality of their pedagogy (Wing & Jinks, 2001). When Dodge Local teachers were asked about their instructional skills, the researcher was optimistic about obtaining a laundry list of teacher leadership skills that the teachers use to enhance student achievement, as well as specific teaching strategies that are deemed as best practices to enhance student achievement. However, the responses from the Dodge Local teachers about their instructional skill sets were a far cry from this forecast.

Dodge Local veteran teachers, with more than 20 years experience, emphasized classroom routines, management techniques, and content-driven skills as their instructional skills. These teachers talked about how they set up their classrooms every year and how they ensure that students are attentive, rather than specifically mentioning teacher-leader behaviors or best practice strategies in the classroom. These routine and
mundane management activities do not focus on instructional leadership, nor do they enhance student achievement by any means (Angelle, 2007; Angelle & DeHart, 2011).

When considering the instructional skills of the teachers in Dodge Local with fewer than 20 years experience, the responses were much different. These teachers, along with the intervention specialist, with 24 years experience, focused on student instructional needs, as well as various teaching modalities to meet the needs of each student. In addition to focusing on the instructional needs of each student, these teachers were also self-reflective of their own professional development needs, mentioning future pursuits for staff development. The practices of these more novice staff members reiterate Angelle and DeHart’s (2011) conclusions that effective teacher leadership is most often executed in the form of actions that influence teaching and learning. The Dodge Local teachers are acting to ensure that they have an influence on student achievement results.

Although the research showed that the characteristics of novice teachers differ from the characteristics exhibited by more veteran teachers related to decision making, novice teachers have less opportunity to participate in decision-making (Nolan & Palazzolo, 2011). Nolan and Palazzolo (2011) concluded that novice teachers are more “involved in decisions related to curriculum, teaching, and textbooks than they are with decisions related to spending priorities, hiring, and designing facilities” (p. 314). Angelle and DeHart (2011) concluded that teachers with less experience were more likely, than their more experienced peers, to be willing to share pedagogical or classroom management knowledge with fellow teachers.
In Dodge Local, the teachers at the K-2 level were not overly concerned with being involved in decision-making. These teachers were content to assist in some choices as it relates to right to read week, or other trivial school matters but did not express any concerns about participation or lack of participation in the decision-making process. However, there was a sense of hostility present at the 3-4 building as it relates to decision making. Although their involvement was less decision-based and merely based on trivial matters, these teachers still perceived that they felt slighted and were overlooked. The Dodge Local teachers in the 3-4 building were hostile about poor communication issues related to administrative leadership.

It would appear that Dodge Local teachers are not involved in decision making that affects school improvement (Kennedy, Deuel, Nelson & Slavit, 2011; Kruse & Louis, 2009). Rather, the K-2 teachers often take part in some trivial school choices. However, the 3-4 teachers in Dodge voiced their concerns about the lack of communication and poor leadership issues that have negatively impacted their school culture, rather than increased their building decision making (Kruse & Louis, 2009; Printy & Marks, 2006).

Dodge Local teachers feel a responsibility toward student achievement and learning. Abelman and Elmore (1999) described responsibility for learning as a combination of the factors of an individual’s conception of responsibility, accountability mechanisms, and expectations. When these were examined in Dodge Local, it was apparent that the Dodge Local teachers all felt responsible for the content that they were teaching to the students. However, only two of the teachers could express the specifics of how their responsibility is defined in terms of student learning. However, Dodge lacks an
internal accountability system; the only accountability mechanisms mentioned by the teachers were the external measures. This lack of an aligned internal accountability system will directly affect their response to external accountability policies (Poole, 2011).

Dodge Local teachers describe their instructional leadership practices based on several factors. Whether a novice or veteran teacher, the years of experience in the classroom demonstrated variations as it related to beliefs about teaching and instructional skills. However, no matter the years of experience, both novice and veteran teachers were focused on student needs in the classroom. All decision making by teachers in Dodge Local was superficial and not really decision making at all. Also, teachers felt a responsibility toward student achievement and learning.

Findings for Research Question Two: How Do Teachers Describe Their Capacity for Instructional Leadership?

In addition to instructional leadership practices that were examined in research question one, the capacity to implement instructional leadership was explored. The effect of the district vision and improvement plan, as well as trust and collaboration were essential components to examine in order to foster student achievement. Visions, although not measurable or attainable in the short term, are critical components of leadership, without which, leadership is destined to fail (Nanus, 1992). Then, Mintrop and MacLellan (2002) explained that an improvement plan is necessary as it contains clear goals that are focused on student achievement. Cosner (2009) described collegial trust as fundamental for work to be completed and for organizational goals to be attained. Finally, collaboration utilizes the talents of all members to bring about change (Hickman
in Preedy, Bennett, & Wise, 2012). These four components work together to assist in developing the capacity to implement instructional leadership.

In developing leadership capacity, the vision must be the first component that is established in the school district. A clear vision is essential to establish the direction and expectations for learning in a school district, thus maintaining a clear focus for all school personnel in order to improve teaching and learning (Deal & Peterson, 2009; Johnson & Chrispeels, 2010; Lashway, 2002; Murphy et al., 2007). However, in Dodge Local, teacher responses indicated that the district vision is either lacking completely, or providing Dodge the benefit of the doubt, perhaps it is not stated and understood. The responses indicated an uncoordinated set of initiatives in Dodge Local, rather than an established vision, which would require expectations for teaching and learning (Murphy et al., 2007).

A vision is most likely lacking in Dodge Local. Many teachers referred to uncoordinated sets of initiatives in the district. Some teachers believed that maintaining the high expectations of retaining the excellent rating on the Local Report Card is the expectation, or as they refer to it, the vision in the district. Other teachers referred to meeting the needs of students and wanting what was best for the children as their vision. Still other teachers openly admitted that there is no vision in Dodge Local. Throughout the discussion about vision, the four elements of vision (information, values, a framework, and insight) described by Nanus (1992) were not evident, nor was there any evidence that there was an inspirational component inherent in a vision to describe a picture of the district in the future (Nanus, 1992; Schlechty, 2002). Thus, the
uncoordinated set of education initiatives in Dodge Local was being mistaken for a vision.

A district improvement plan could be a critical tool for aligned goals, strategies, and actions, which could ultimately lead to student achievement (McLaughlin, 1993). Kruse and Louis (2009) described an improvement plan as a guide to indicate “what are we doing” and “where are we going” (p. 169). Thus, a school district can use a plan to cycle through Smylie’s (2010) improvement plan cycle components and convert the plan into action to realize the true school improvement benefits.

Dodge Local lacked a formal school improvement plan, much the same as Dodge Local lacked a formal vision. Teachers were willing to share components that they believed were de facto goals if a school improvement plan did exist. All of the Dodge Local teachers mentioned the statutory accountability demands and the high expectations for achievement as a result of the demands. In order to account for these high expectations, the teachers also mentioned meeting individual student needs as a means to accomplish this task. Although there were no formal plan structures mentioned by any of the Dodge Local teachers, it could be inferred that the teachers are using the state accountability demands to indicate what Mintrop and MacLellan (2002) explained as a focus on student achievement and activities directed toward curriculum and instruction. Thus, the state accountability demands and meeting individual student needs are their current de facto improvement plan goals.

Developing relationships with your colleagues is essential to instructional leadership capacity. The element of trust can affect the development of communication and cooperation in these relationships, as well as affecting student achievement.
Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000). Tschannen-Moran (2004) described trust as including five core elements—benevolence, honesty, reliability, competence, and openness—and has asserted that trust among teachers is linked to higher student achievement.

The Dodge Local teachers at the K-2 building perceived that trust existed between the teachers and the administrator. They specifically mentioned that they believed that the facet of open communication, accurate or proactive communication, was key because they felt that they could feel comfortable speaking to their administrator about anything that would arise (Tschannen-Moran, 2004).

However, the Dodge Local teachers at the 3-4 building were in direct contrast to this feeling. These educators believed that four of the facets of trust were missing between the teachers and administrators. These teachers provided specific examples where they believed that the administrators had lacked honesty, openness, competence, and reliability (Tschannen-Moran, 2004). Teachers believed that there were secretive practices and decisions being made during the past year without their knowledge. In the past, the Dodge Local teachers perceived that they were not in the dark about forthcoming events, but this year they believed that they were always told after the fact. With some many administrative changes, issues seemed to fall through the cracks and were not being handled as in the past. Due to the lack of administrative staffing, teachers did not feel that they could rely on their administrator to be available to them to answer questions or assist as needed. All of these issues referenced Tschannen-Moran’s (2004) elements of trust and were lacking in the teacher-administrator relationship in the 3-4 building in Dodge Local.
Although the teacher-to-administrator trust was in direct contrast from building to building, the teacher-to-teacher trust at both buildings was strong. The teacher-to-teacher trust most directly impacts the student achievement, which can impact instructional leadership capacity (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000). The teachers in Dodge Local have a strong sense of benevolence for one another, or caring (Tschannen-Moran, 2004). In Dodge, this is evidenced through their in-house social gatherings, their gatherings outside of school, as well as their spiritual connections. Along with their benevolence, there is an obvious openness, or sharing of teaching and learning information and materials among one another. The teachers in Dodge Local have built a community of trust through their social, spiritual, and workplace-centered gatherings.

Collaboration is the next step in examining instructional leadership capacity. It might be assumed that schools like Dodge where there is a high level of trust among the teachers would also have a high level of collaboration. However, often the terms, collegiality and congeniality are confused; collegiality is when one is driven to like one another based on professional work or behavior; congeniality is when one is driven to like one another based on personal interests (Sharpe, Lounsbery, & Templin, 1997). Dodge Local teachers participating in many social endeavors inside and outside of the school may be victims of congeniality, where they like each other for social reasons and not necessarily professional reasons.

The key to collaboration is to reach true collaboration based on professional interests where three levels of collaboration can exist among teachers (from least to most collaborative): superficial collaboration, segmented collaboration, or instructional collaboration (Kise & Russell, 2008). In Dodge Local, there is a great deal of teacher-to-
teacher trust, which means that there should be a great chance to build quality collaboration (Tschannen-Moran, 2004). Although the Dodge Local teachers believe that their culture is the most collaborative, the descriptions of their collaborations (teacher meetings, student needs) indicate superficial collaboration (Kise & Russell, 2008). Dodge Local teacher collaborative practices discussed never indicated deep collaborative practices (enduring understandings about teaching and learning) or instructional collaboration (Kise & Russell, 2008). Although the Dodge Local teachers are congenial and have a positive culture of trust with one another, they have a long way to go to develop deep collaboration, or as Kise and Russell (2008) described it, instructional collaboration.

Dodge Local teachers describe their instructional leadership capacity in terms of instructional vision, improvement plan, trust, and collaboration. The instructional vision and improvement plan in Dodge are lacking and are merely an uncoordinated set of initiatives. However, there are statutory accountability components that the teachers mentioned that are serving as their de facto vision and improvement plan goals. Administrator-to-teacher trust is lacking in the 3-4 building but is present in the K-2 building. Teacher-to-teacher trust is strong especially in the areas of benevolence and openness. Finally, collaboration is present but is superficial, and the Dodge Local teachers have a long road ahead to reach instructional collaboration. Their strong teacher-to-teacher trust will be a key component to attain that goal.
Findings for Research Question Three: What Factors Do Teachers Perceive as Levers for Change in Their Own Instructional Leadership Practice?

Instructional leadership practices were examined, several arenas for instructional leadership capacity were explored, and factors for change as a result of accountability demands are the final component to be analyzed. Accountability demands and their impact on instructional practice are reviewed in regards to teachers’ perceptions of external accountability demands and internal accountability demands.

As the quality of America’s educational system has been questioned over the past 30 years, there has been a rise in the amount of legislative driven accountability reforms. Accountability can be defined as simply as to “a variety of formal and informal ways by which people in schools give an account of their actions to someone in a position of formal authority inside or outside the school” (Abelman & Elmore, 1999, p. 4). Most recently, No Child Left Behind passed a series of statutory accountability-driven reforms that not only made school leaders more accountable for student achievement in their schools, but also challenged schools to meet the mandates or face dire circumstances (Graczewski, Knudson, & Holzman, 2009; Mangin, 2007; Portin et al., 2006). However, in order for a school to respond to the external accountability mandates, it must have a strong internal accountability system (Abelman & Elmore, 1999).

Accountability has not been the source of a separate discussion with the Dodge Local teachers in the research interviews. However, the external accountability demands have surfaced in teacher responses on a few occasions when discussing other issues during the interview process. For instance, Dodge Local teachers referenced only external accountability measures in their responses to research question one as it related
to accountability mechanisms and its relationship to responsibility to learning. The Dodge Local teachers noted the external accountability demands as the de facto vision and goals for the school improvement plan as presented in the analysis of research question two.

Not unlike research question one and research question two, the Dodge Local teachers once again referenced the external accountability demands as a component of their responses in research question three. However, the difference remains that this question is actually asking about the accountability demands. As the teachers shared how the external accountability demands have impacted their instructional practice, the teachers did not mention how any internal accountability demands have impacted their practice. According to Abelman and Elmore (1999), the internal accountability system must be strong in order to respond to the external accountability mandates, which appears is lacking in Dodge.

Even though many of the Dodge Local teachers were informed regarding external accountability demands and could fluently list them, they lacked the ability to describe the meaning of each demand and how it impacts them in the classroom. Teachers must be able to understand the external accountability system in order to develop the internal accountability system, which will impact student achievement. However, this will be impossible until the Dodge Local teachers understand the relationship between the internal and external accountability system. Elmore (2010) discussed the critical relationship between external and internal accountability demands and the fact that none of the external accountability will be effective until the internal system is established. The only external accountability demand that the Dodge Local teachers could describe to
a greater degree including the positive impact it will make on their instructional practice was the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). The change with the new standards has afforded teachers the ability to focus on standards and curriculum in depth giving them more confidence in what they should be teaching.

Dodge Local teachers had the opportunity to share their perspective regarding positive and negative effects of the new accountability demands on their instructional practices. The reactions of teachers to change complement the research of Donnelly and Sadler (2009) and Waugh and Punch (1987). The novice teachers in Dodge tended to have more positive comments about the changes that accompany accountability. Donnelly and Sadler (2009) supported this by stating that inexperienced teachers tend to view standards more positively. In the 3-4 building, which had the low trust with the administrator, as well as the outlier, Allie Reckler, on many research items, there was a preponderance of negative views about the new standards, accountability demands, building, administrators, etc. With this in mind, when teachers do not feel supported by their school leadership, change will be viewed as negative (Waugh & Punch, 1987). Many Dodge Local teachers examined the cost benefit of the change as explained by Waugh and Punch (1987). If the time to prepare for and implement the change will be worth it in the end, then, they will view the change as positive; if not, then the opposite will occur. Depending on the teacher, the accountability initiative, and the time factor, they did the cost benefit allocation to determine its worth. However, many of the teachers just believed that the tasks were too time consuming and taking too much time away from their instruction of students to be worth it in the end.
Accountability demands are the critical component for district success as measured by the legislature. Dodge Local teachers describe the impact of the external and internal demands on their instructional practice. It appears that Dodge Local does not have a structured and aligned internal accountability system to drive the external accountability system. The research tells us that their system cannot be strong without both components. However, the Dodge Local teachers have to first understand the external accountability demands in order to create an internal accountability system.

**Discussion**

The Dodge Local Schools have been considered an excellent school district for the past 11 years. Preliminary results of the new Local Report Card released in Fall 2013, including changes implemented based upon the waiver that the Ohio Department of Education submitted to the U.S. Department of Education in May 2012, still demonstrate that Dodge Local will be receiving an excellent rating, or the new grade of “A”.

The purpose of this descriptive study was to examine teacher perceptions of their own instructional leadership within a K-2 and a 3-4 building as a result of increased statutory accountability demands. More specifically, this study gathered information and data related to the instructional leadership present in the Dodge Local Schools District. The information gathered and analyzed from Dodge Local painted a picture of a school district that may appear excellent on the outside, as measured by the Local Report Card. However, the instructional leadership scaffolding, which can be considered the foundation on which student achievement rests, is not solid.

The answers to each research question suggested deficits in instructional leadership within the district. Across all findings and of much interest to the researcher
was the superficiality of the respondents to interview items. It was obvious that for the most part, the teachers in Dodge did not have deep enduring discussions about instruction or activities and events that would contribute to instructional leadership, or their answers would have reflected some of their understandings, thoughts, and processes. It appears that teachers do not have the necessary components of leadership to build schools that function at maximum capacity. Finally, they did not have a deep enough understanding of the new accountability demands to make the necessary changes to instruction.

When it is found that a school district like Dodge is excellent, has been excellent, and continues to be excellent, even with all the shortcomings mentioned, it makes me stop and think, what does being an excellent district really mean? If you can be excellent, but have so many deficiencies, is that really excellent? More to the point, what does the rating excellent mean when applied as a summative assessment of a school or district?

Arne Duncan, the U.S. Secretary of Education, made a reference to whether the quality of our schools is at the level that we perceive them to be on the outside looking in when he spoke to a group of state superintendents in November 2013. He was speaking about the heightened rigor within the new Common Core State Standards. Along with the new Common Core Standards there has been quite a bit of opposition about their implementation and content. Mr. Duncan specifically mentioned some of the negative feedback that he has received, “It's fascinating to me that some of the pushback is coming from, sort of, white suburban moms who -- all of a sudden -- their child isn't as brilliant as they thought they were and their school isn't quite as good as they thought they were” (Strauss, 2013, “White Suburban Moms Upset,” para. 9). Understandably the statement brought on the ire of the media. However, Mr. Duncan was making a point that the
schools that parents so long have thought have looked good may look much different once the Common Core Standards are assessed. His thinking is supported by the findings of this work.

While being measured against the old standards, Dodge looks excellent. However, all of the fundamental processes that are necessary for quality instructional leadership are absent from the leadership in Dodge Local. According to Mr. Duncan, the rigors of the Common Core may separate the good schools from the schools that appeared to be good. Will this be true in Dodge Local’s case? Is the Common Core the final measure that will reveal the state of instructional leadership at Dodge? It would seem that a school like Dodge should not be awarded a rating of “excellent” if it is missing the necessary leadership components to suggest that it is the actions of school personnel and not other external factors that contribute to the strong results on the Local Report Card.

However, examining the two types of data that can be reported for assessment and decision-making purposes more closely may provide some additional options. These data are reported on the Local Report Card, are politically determined, summative, and largely symbolic (Kruse & Johnson, 2014). Symbolic data are generally considered external accountability data reported as a result of statutory accountability demands and serve as a public symbol for school effectiveness. Unfortunately, these data fail to recognize the true picture of what is actually occurring in the district and therefore lack legitimacy as a measure of the genuine context and complexity of Dodge, or any other district.

Separate from symbolic data, substantive data offer school leaders and teachers alike, data that have the potential to inform daily classroom level decisions (Kruse &
Johnson, 2014). The Local Report does not report any type of substantive data or data that would assist teachers in making curriculum, assessment, and instruction choices. These data could prove beneficial to teachers in the classroom as they could be a means to use data internally and formatively, or ongoing. However, including formative or substantive data on a new Local Report Card is not the means to the end. Dodge Local, although unique in many aspects, shares the culture of superficial collaboration with many other school districts. As explained previously, Dodge’s K-2 building is congenial, but not collegial. The superficial conversations about school did not dive into deep enduring understandings about curriculum and instruction. Most likely, if Dodge Local teachers had the substantive data to examine, the conversations regarding the data would either be contrived, or superficial. In order for the teachers to make the best use of the data, they would require professional development, as well as cultural changes to ensure that the substantive data would be put to good use.

Organizations, like Dodge Local, need to change their cultures and challenge themselves to become oriented toward team learning in order to move forward with student achievement. Kruse and Johnson (2014) referred to this practice as mindfulness. Instead of just admiring data, which organizations have become so akin to, members participate in a greater degree of thought and the culture changes with the thinking. Thus, with mindfulness, the culture of the organization changes to one that embraces “effective and reliable performance,” as well as self-directed learning (Kruse & Johnson, 2014, p. 4).

In a school district that continues to receive excellent ratings, like Dodge, the community and staff may become complacent. The community comes to expect the
excellent rating. Community members begin to take excellence for granted no matter the challenge on the horizon. Thus, despite the warning from Mr. Duncan about the rigor inherent in the Common Core, the community will assume that the school will rise to the occasion. It also becomes more challenging to motivate a staff of teachers, administrators, students, and others when there is a complacency regarding excellence. The culture in the school is paradoxical where there is an expectation for excellence, but there is less focus on the need for instructional improvement. The teachers, staff, and community members believe that they have already accomplished it; this echoes Collins’ (2009) notion of hubris or being overconfident that something will occur.

The idea that Dodge Local teachers are overconfident does not fare well for Dodge Local. This positions the district in the first stage of organization decline. Obviously, if they continue on this path with greed and denial, they could end up spiraling out of control into eventual and imminent doom. Kruse and Johnson (2014) suggested that highly reliable organizations assume that failure is inevitable but have a plan for how to learn from it, as well as rely on expertise in problem solving. Districts that choose to change their culture from one of overconfidence to one of learning or mindfulness have the potential to be on a path to enhanced learning at all levels of the organization. The time is now for Dodge, and like districts, to realize that their culture must change from one of complacency to one of learning or mindfulness in order to move forward.

In order to make a change in Dodge, or in like districts, to move forward, the school improvement plan is the place to begin. An improvement plan, according to Smylie (2010), will afford all school personnel to begin with the vision. Instead of all
teachers having different depictions of goals, expectations, strategies, and action steps, an improvement plan would provide the essential framework for all components for the district personnel. Thus, instructional practices and skills would be defined and the data, when discussed in mindful and collaborative ways, could be reviewed and revised. Therefore, the data would be driving the instruction in the district. The professional development needs of the district would be determined based on the data discussions. In the end, Dodge Local, or other like districts, would be using a Plan, Do, Check, Act Cycle based on mindful conversations using substantive data (Smylie, 2010). Dodge would be functioning with internal accountability based on a new culture of collaboration where data are examined with mindfulness.

In a district like Dodge, with an excellent rating and a poor internal support structure, it begs the question of what Dodge could be like if the instructional leadership system in Dodge was operating as it should be as well. The potential may be endless, but one will never know, unless it happens.

Limitations of Findings

There are several factors that may have impacted the findings in this study. All of the limitations in this study are related to the sample chosen to study in Dodge Local. The three factors prevalent to the research that may have impacted the findings include: the initial survey, the teachers who agreed to participate, and finally the sample size. Each of these is discussed in relation to the study.

Dodge Local is a small midwestern district. The entire K-4 teaching staff from two buildings assembled at a staff meeting for the researcher to administer the preliminary survey (Appendix A). A total of 27 surveys were completed. The researcher
wanted a relative cross-section of teachers across grade level, years of teaching, and teaching assignment. Upon initial analysis of survey data, the research had to eliminate any teacher who did not want to participate in the survey, four total. Of the remaining, 23 surveys, the researcher eliminated any teacher who was not a core teacher, three in total. (The non-core teachers eliminated were art, physical education, and a speech-language pathologist.) The non-core teachers were eliminated because they would not have direct knowledge of how the accountability demands have impacted their instructional practice in the core subjects. The researcher then chose 11 teachers from the 20 remaining to obtain a cross-section of grade level, years of teaching, and teaching assignment. The researcher, without any knowledge of the individuals, completed this selection. However, it was not generated randomly, so there is always a chance that the sample was not as equally balanced as it could have been.

The final question asked on the initial survey to the teachers in the staff meeting was whether it was acceptable for the researcher to contact them to follow-up. As mentioned previously, four teachers declined to be contacted. It could be that the individuals who agreed to participate in the study are more optimistic than their peers who declined to be contacted.

Finally, Dodge Local is a small school district. Twenty-seven teachers were initially surveyed and 11 were interviewed. Eleven interviews constitute a relatively small sample size. It is acknowledged that the data from Dodge Local are data from Dodge Local and cannot be generalized to other school districts.
Implications

The results of this study indicate that teachers in a school district that has been excellent for the past 11 school years, Dodge Local, are not making considerable changes in their instructional leadership practices as a result of accountability demands. Moreover, it can be said that teachers in Dodge Local do not have deep enduring understandings of the external accountability demands or the instructional leadership changes necessary to improve student achievement.

This study found that Dodge Local teachers were lacking instructional leadership practices in their classrooms. The instructional leadership practices described throughout this research project prove to be significant in assisting to persevere through many of the new accountability demands. However, teachers in Dodge Local are unable to initiate these practices on their own in this school district for two critical reasons: their lack of understanding of the practices and the lack of administrative modeling of the instructional leadership practices. Both of these deficiencies could be corrected and could impact student achievement if the administrators in Dodge afforded the teachers the modeling of these instructional leadership skills.

It is essential for the principal to become a key model for instructional leadership for teachers. Although teachers have the greatest impact on student achievement (Fancera & Bliss, 2011; Helterbran, 2010; Southworth, 2002; Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008), principals who focus on instruction, foster community and trust, and clearly communicate school mission impact teacher instructional practice (Supovitz et al., 2010). Thus, when principals model the use of collaboration, trust, decision making, and improvement planning, teacher behaviors should follow. It was clear in Dodge that trust needs to be
established with the teaching staff at the 3-4 building, as forming a relationship with this staff is the only means to change the culture in the building (Kruse & Louis, 2009).

Teachers in Dodge Local do not understand or possibly accept the accountability mandates. Throughout the interview process, the teachers provided superficial and trivial answers to questions regarding the accountability demands. They lacked the knowledge to describe any of them in detail, except for the Common Core State Standards, which are required to be implemented this school year in their classrooms. This lack of knowledge about the accountability mandates could also be a byproduct of their complacency due to their excellent rating. When a district continues to score the highest rating on the Local Report Card, teachers appear to become less concerned about how to interpret the measures on the Card. However, in school districts that are achieving at less than expected levels, the district teachers usually tend to dissect the data to determine exactly what criteria constituted the measure and how to change it for the future. Thus, in this instance, excellence on the Local Report Card may have made the teachers a victim of their own success; the teachers are less concerned about the Local Report Card, the Report Card measures, and what each measure means on the Local Report Card. Thus, the Report Card becomes less of a tool for the school district to use to improve itself and one to just wait for it to be published each year to hang on the refrigerator. This purpose seems to be in direct conflict with the purpose of the Local Report Card from the legislature.

**Recommendations**

The purpose behind the statutory accountability legislation was to seek improvement in the quality of schools. Many high achieving school districts, according
to the Local Report Card, in the state of Ohio continue to receive excellent ratings with
the new accountability mandates. Dodge Local is an example of an excellent school
district that continues to meet the external accountability mandates, but after examining
the internal instructional leadership structures, findings from this study suggest that it is
in disarray internally. The uncoordinated educational initiatives that Dodge is engaged in
does not lend itself to a clean and structured internal accountability system that is
necessary to support the external accountability structure as described by Abelman and
Elmore (1999).

If the purpose of the Local Report Card is to see growth in schools and a school
district like Dodge continues to see excellence on external accountability measures, it
would seem that the district is stagnant. However, growth could be realized if the
internal accountability system was promoted and developed. Growth on the
accountability initiatives can be realized by a district like Dodge if it is viewed as positive
by the staff members (Waugh & Punch, 1987). This begins with trust between the
teachers, which has already been realized at both buildings. However, developing trust
between teachers and administrators, although established at the K-2 building, needs a
considerable amount of work at the 3-4 building. The means to begin to establish the
trust relationship is with the five factors of trust (Tschannen-Moran, 2004) and
thoughtfully implementing them in the building. Once trust is lost, it is difficult to re-
establish, but it can be done.

The Local Report Card in the state of Ohio could use revisions to accommodate
districts like Dodge Local. The point has been made that the statutory accountability
mandates have affected the instructional leadership practices of teachers in Dodge Local
to a minimal degree. Since accountability mandates will likely be a fixture in education for the foreseeable future, the legislators may need to look at the measuring stick that is being used to rank each school district in the state. If the external accountability mandates are the only measures that count and they are only being measured once a year, it is possible for a school district, like Dodge, to survive as excellent; excellent on the outside, because there are not deep enough measures to really examine what is occurring inside the district. If excellent really means excellent or on the new Local Report Card, an A really means an A, then the school district should be examined more comprehensively.

Examining school districts to a greater degree would provide excellent school districts that may have developed complacency, with data to examine. These districts could develop collaborative groups and have teachers utilize mindful thinking (Kruse & Johnson, 2014). Instead of just admiring data, members would participate in a greater degree of thought and the culture changes with the thinking.

**Recommendations for Further Research**

It is this researcher’s contention that the Local Report Card excellent ratings in the State of Ohio do not necessarily means that the district’s internal accountability systems and focus on instruction is excellent as well. This could indicate a failure on the part of the state to rank organizational excellence. Since this study indicated that Dodge Local was lacking instructional leadership, follow-up studies with Dodge Local and similar districts should be conducted to determine the long-term impact of a poorly-defined, or lacking, internal accountability system on the school district’s Local Report Card rating.
This study examined the instructional leadership perspectives of teachers in Dodge Local, a high-performing, homogeneous, and rural school district. Studies should be replicated in similar school districts to determine if this sample is representative of other high-performing, homogeneous, and rural districts.

**Conclusion**

The purpose of this descriptive study was to examine teacher perceptions of their own instructional leadership within a K-2 and a 3-4 building as a result of increased statutory accountability demands. Dodge Local teachers answered questions regarding their perceptions of their own instructional leadership practices, instructional leadership capacity, and the impact of accountability demands on their instructional leadership practices.

This study gathered information and data related to the instructional leadership present in the Dodge Local Schools District from the perceptions of teachers. No matter their years of experience, teachers focused on student needs in the classroom and felt a responsibility toward student achievement and learning. In regards to instructional capacity, teacher-to-teacher trust is high in both buildings. Although a formal improvement plan and vision are absent, teachers refer to various accountability demands as de facto goals. Finally, teachers in Dodge do not have an enduring understanding of accountability demands which can lead to meaningful conversations about teaching and learning. This lack of knowledge, coupled with the absence of instructional leadership, will not fare well in assisting them to develop their instructional leadership practices.

The results of this qualitative study indicate that a school district like Dodge Local, with 11 years of excellent ratings, may redefine “excellence” for educational
practitioners. Although Dodge clearly achieved excellence on statutory external accountability demands, teacher understanding of these external accountability demands was lacking. Educators in Dodge did not have a broad enough awareness of the demands. Additionally they lacked discrete ideas of how the demands would impact their instructional practices.

In today’s high stakes educational climate, legislators continue to require more and expect more of our students. Furthermore, it appears that accountability demands will only continue to increase. The literature on accountability is clear in stating that a strong external accountability system is best preceded by a strong internal accountability system (Elmore, 1999). So, it remains to be seen if the Common Core State Standards will have a negative impact on schools as mentioned by Duncan (Strauss, 2013). If the Common Core does have a substantial impact, it will be interesting to determine if the impact is greater on school districts, like Dodge, without the components of an internal accountability system and the strong foundation instructional leadership on which to build.
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APPENDIX A

K-4 ELEMENTARY SURVEY

1. What is your gender?  M  F

2. How many years have you been teaching?
   (circle one)  1-5  5-10  10-15  15-20  20-25  25+  

3. What is your highest degree attained?
   (circle one)  Bachelor’s  Master’s  Doctoral

4. What teaching certification do you currently hold from the Ohio Department of Education?
   (for example: PreK-3, I.S., 1-8, etc…)  (Fill-in)  

5. Do you currently hold a K-12 Reading Endorsement?  Yes  No  In Progress

6. What is your current teaching grade level?
   (circle one)  K  1  2  3  4  Other____________________

7. What is your current teaching assignment?  (For example: General Ed classroom teacher, Special Education Inclusion, Special Education Resource room, Title I, etc…)
   (Fill-in)  _____________________________

Please rate your answers below.

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<th></th>
<th>Very Aware/Very Likely</th>
<th>Somewhat Aware/Somewhat Likely</th>
<th>Slightly Aware/Slightly Likely</th>
<th>Not Aware/Not Likely</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How aware are you of pressures for teachers to perform?</td>
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<tr>
<td>How aware are you of the Ohio Department of Education Local Report Card for school districts?</td>
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<tr>
<td>How likely will the Ohio Department of Education Local Report Card for school districts influence your actions as a teacher?</td>
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How aware are you of the *Ohio Teacher Evaluation System (OTES)*?

How likely will the *Ohio Teacher Evaluation System (OTES)* influence your actions as a teacher?

How aware are you of the *Third Grade Reading Guarantee*?

How likely will the *Third Grade Reading Guarantee* influence your actions as a teacher?

How aware are you of *Value Added and Student Growth Measures*?

How likely will the *Value Added and Student Growth Measures* influence your actions as a teacher?

How aware are you of *Response to Intervention (RTI)*?

How likely will *Response to Intervention (RTI)* influence your actions as a teacher?

Thank you for completing this survey. May I follow-up with you? Yes  No

If YES, please provide your

Name___________________________, Phone____________________,
Email___________________________
# APPENDIX B

## DODGE LOCAL K-4 TEACHER SURVEY

| Gender | F | F | F | F | F | F | F | F | F | F | F | F | F | F | F | F | F | F | F | F | F | F | F | F | F |
| Hgstd Degree | M | B | M | M | B | B | M | B | M | B | M | B | M | M | B | M |
| Tchg Cent | K-4 | 1-8 | 1-8 | K-12 | K-12 | K-12 | K-12 | K-12 | K-12 | K-12 | K-12 | K-12 | K-12 | K-12 | K-12 | K-12 |
| Tchg Asn | Gen Ed | Gen Ed | Gen Ed | Gen Ed | Art | PE | 2 | Title | Title | Title | Title | Title | Title | Title | Title | Title |
| Aware Pressures to Perform | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 |
|Aware LRC | 4 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 4 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 3 |
| Likely LRC Influence actions | 4 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| Aware OTE | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 4 |
| Likely OTE Influence actions | 4 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| Aware TGRG | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 4 |
| Likely TGRG Influence actions | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 3 |
| Aware VA & SG | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 |
| Likely VA & SG Influence actions | 4 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| Aware RTI | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| Likely RTI Influence actions | 4 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| Follow-up? | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | N | N | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N | N |

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## APPENDIX C

### INTERVIEW QUESTIONS ORGANIZED BY RESEARCH QUESTION

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Teacher Interview Questions</th>
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<tr>
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<td><strong>Skills/Knowledge</strong>&lt;br&gt;A thorough knowledge of curriculum, instruction, and assessment is necessary in order to move forward with school improvement (McEwan, 2003).&lt;br&gt;An effective leader must understand criteria that makes teaching effective in order to improve instruction and professional knowledge (Robinson, 2010).&lt;br&gt;Teacher leaders can demo new things, aspire for the best and help others (Kurtz, 2009; Taylor et al., 2011).&lt;br&gt;Leaders need understanding of knowledge necessary for teachers to teacher well—content, pedagogical, curricular, knowledge of learners to perform school improvement functions (Robinson, 2010).&lt;br&gt;Experts solve problems at deeper levels; expert problem solvers store relevant knowledge and link it to solve problems (Robinson, 2010).</td>
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<td>1. Let’s begin by talking about your instructional leadership <strong>beliefs</strong>. Tell me about your beliefs regarding student achievement. I am interested in learning about your perception of how a teacher affects <strong>student achievement</strong>. Can you provide me an example or tell me a story where this is illustrated?&lt;br&gt;Probes:&lt;br&gt;a) Can you respond to the statement...&quot;when a student does better it is because a teacher exerted more effort&quot;.&lt;br&gt;b) Can you respond to the statement...&quot;the influence of a student’s home experiences can be overcome with good teaching&quot;.</td>
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<td>2. As a teacher, describe your perceptions of the areas of instructional practice where you believe you have exceptional <strong>skills</strong>?&lt;br&gt;Probes:&lt;br&gt;a) Tell me your perceptions about your instructional skills.&lt;br&gt;b) Can you describe the areas of <strong>professional growth</strong> that you perceive necessary for your instructional practice?&lt;br&gt;c) Do you suggest professional development activities for yourself and other building staff members?</td>
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<td>3. What is your perception of how you have been involved in <strong>decision-making</strong> in the school?&lt;br&gt;Probes:&lt;br&gt;a) Are there committees on which you sit in order to facilitate instructional decisions?&lt;br&gt;b) Do you hold a leadership position in the school or on your grade level team?&lt;br&gt;c) Can you provide me an example of how a <strong>Professional growth</strong>&lt;br&gt;Roles and responsibilities of leaders focus on what is needed to improve student achievement through PD (Fulmer, 2006). An effective leader can make suggestions to a teacher on how to improve professional knowledge and instruction (Robinson, 2010). Central Office must use data to make decisions about programming and tools for principals and teachers (Coburn et al., 2009; MacIver &amp; Farley, 2003).</td>
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   a) Can you respond to the statement..."when a student does better it is because a teacher exerted more effort"?  
   b) Can you respond to the statement..."the influence of a student’s home experiences can be overcome with good teaching".  

2. As a teacher, describe your perceptions of the areas of instructional practice where you believe you have exceptional skills? Probes:  
   a) Tell me your perceptions about your instructional skills.  
   b) Can you describe the areas of professional growth that you perceive necessary for your instructional practice?  
   c) Do you suggest professional development activities for yourself and other building staff members?  

3. What is your perception of how you have been involved in decision-making in the school? Probes:  
   a) Are there committees on which you sit in order to facilitate instructional decisions?  
   b) Do you hold a leadership position in the school or on your grade level team?  
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Effective instructional leadership includes content knowledge, ability to solve problems, and interpersonal trust (Robinson, 2010). Leaders focus on instructional leadership to influence student achievement (Millward & Tinusier, 2016; Robinson). Teacher instructional practice has the greatest impact on student achievement (Fancara & Bliss, 2011; Helterbran, 2010; Southworth, 2002; Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008).

Teachers answer the question of "Who am I" to conduct a personal assessment of their values, behaviors and philosophies. Knowing their own leads to an understanding that others may be different and they need to accept them to work together. Reflecting also helps them to better understand their own strengths (Katzmann, 2009).

Experienced teachers tend to feel that the "new" testing and accountability reflects less flexibility, less freedom, less critical thinking, less hands-on activity, less professionalism, less focus on whole child. Inexperienced teacher sees it in terms of gains: Collaboration, consistency, pedagogical freedom (Winkler, 2002).

Skills/Knowledge

A thorough knowledge of curriculum, instruction, and assessment is necessary in order to move forward with school improvement (McEwan, 2003). An effective leader must understand criteria that makes teaching effective in order to improve instruction and professional knowledge (Robinson, 2010). Teacher leaders can demo new things, aspire for the best and help others (Kurtz, 2009; Taylor et al., 2011).

Leaders need understanding of knowledge necessary for teachers to teacher well—content, pedagogical, curricular, knowledge of learners to perform school improvement functions (Robinson, 2010).

Experts solve problems at deeper levels; expert problem solvers store relevant knowledge and link it to solve problems (Robinson, 2010).

Professional Growth

Roles and responsibilities of leaders focus on what is needed to improve student achievement through PD (Falmer, 2006). An effective leader can make suggestions to a teacher on how to improve professional knowledge and instruction (Robinson, 2010). Central Office must use data to make decisions about programming and tools for principals and teachers (Coburn et al., 2009; Mcdyer & Farley, 2003).
## 5. What is your perception of the district/school vision for instruction and student success? Is it a driving force behind your instructional practice?
Probes:
- a) Does the district have a improvement plan and a vision for student achievement?
- b) Does the building have an improvement plan and a vision for student achievement?
- c) Are your student achievement goals aligned?
- d) What is the district trying to accomplish?

## 6. What is your perception of how best practices about teaching and learning are shared in the building?
Probes:
- a) Do other teachers in the building turn to you with instructional problems or concerns?
- b) Are you considered an instructional resource person?

## 7. Do you perceive there to be a culture of trust in your school building? How has this developed? Can you provide me an example of how you know it exists?

## 8. Do you perceive there to be a collaborative culture in the school building? Can you tell me how you know this is the case?

### Vision
Vision establishes expectations for learning and focus on students (Murphy et al., 2007).
Superintendent should provide a clear instructional vision and focus (Doskot, 2010; Bederson, 1995; Csikszentmihalyi, 2006; Peterson, 2002; Delphi & Grant, 2010; Petersen, 1999).
Principals must create school priorities (Firestone; 2009; Hoy, 1990; Louis & Wahlstrom, 2011; Peterson & Deal, 1998; Supovitz et al., 2010).

### Shared
In order to meet accountability demands, IL must be shared (Kruse & Louis, 2009; Kurtz, 2009; Priyti & Marks, 2006).
Shared responsibility for instructional leadership (Fulmer, 2006; Heltbran, 2010; Kurtz, 2009).

### Trust
Interpersonal trust is a critical leadership capability (Robinson, 2010). Social trust is needed to improve student learning (Tschannen-Moran, 2000; Kruse & Louis, 1995, 2009; Bryk & Schneider, 2003; Conner, 2009).
Must be consistency on individual’s beliefs, norms, and values (Abelman & Elmore, 1999).
Best student learning occurs where principals promote a positive school climate where teachers feel empowered (Angelle & Dehart, 2011; Firestone & Martinez, 2007; Heltbran, 2010).

### Collaboration
Teachers must have time to collaborate to focus on student learning and improve instruction (Louis & Wahlstrom, 2011; Murphy et al., 2007; Priyti & Marks, 2006).
Engaging in student achievement dialogue demonstrated improvement (Pajak & Glickman, 1989).
Research shows that the participatory process where teachers and admin work together to make decisions will have increase impact on student achievement (Nolan and Palazzolo, 2011).
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| 9  | When you glance at the list of statutory accountability demands that I provided you at the beginning of the interview, what has been your experience with any of these demands? Probes: **a)** What is your perception of these demands and what they mean? **b)** Does your school have any internal accountability demands? | **Accountability demands**
- Internal accountability system forces schools to hold each other accountable (Poole, 2011; Elmore, 2010).
- Internal accountability includes responsibility, expectations and roles for performance (Knapp & Feldman, 2012).
- Internal accountability must delineate a system of consequences for not fulfilling expectations responsibilities (Abelman & Elmore, 1999).
- Internal accountability behaviors direct school toward continuous improvement (Poole, 2013). |
| 10 | Do you perceive that the accountability demands have affected your instructional practice? Can you tell me a story about how this is true? Probes: **a)** Have any of the accountability mandates improved your instructional practices? **b)** Have any of the accountability mandates negatively impacted your instructional practices? | **Affected**
- Organizational structure of schools and trust has impeded change (Cellay, 2011; Bryk & Schneider, 2003; Conner, 2009; Kruse & Louis, 2009).
- **ESEA** Waiver has raised the stakes on the Local Report Card (ODE, 2012).
- Organizational decline factors can affect response to change and improvement (Collins, 2009; Weitzel & Jonsson, 1989; Hambrick & D'Aveni, 1988). Accountability standards and scores tell us how we are doing, but not what to do (Elmore, 2010).
- Teacher receptivity to change: Attitude, fears, practicality, expectation, support, cost (Waugh & Punch, 1987).
- Teachers have various views of standards and accountability resulting in embracing or rejecting them: Standards provide guidance, overcrowding of curriculum, focus on testing (Donnelly & Sadler, 2009). |
| 11 | Specifically thinking about expectations and consequences, what is your perception about your instructional leadership practices that are affected by accountability demands? Probes: **a)** What do you perceive has made your instructional leadership practices easier or more difficult? **b)** Do any of the accountability demands and possible changes resulting from them fit into your current teaching methodology? **c)** Do you believe that changing will be “worth it” in the end? |
APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

TEACHER

Introductory Protocol:

This is Teacher __ interviewed by Shawna DeVoe on [date] at [time] at [location]. Thank you for agreeing to participate in the interview process. Today, we’ll be talking about your perceptions of instructional leadership as a result of increased statutory accountability demands. I will be audio-taping our conversation today, as well as taking some notes. All of your answers will remain anonymous and you have the option to discontinue the interview at any time. Please check the box on the consent form to indicate that you have given me permission to use this interview as a component of my research for my dissertation at the University of Akron.

I have planned this interview to last approximately one hour. During this time, I have several questions that I would like to ask you. Do you have any questions before we begin?

Introduction:

I chose to speak with you today because you are a teacher in a school district that has consistently achieved Excellent ratings on the Ohio Department of Education Local Report Card. You have also indicated, on the brief survey at the staff meeting last month, that you are very aware of recent statutory accountability changes and the fact that these changes will likely influence your actions as a teacher.

I am interested in investigating teacher perceptions of the impact that statutory accountability demands have on teacher instructional leadership practices. My study does not aim to evaluate your characteristics or techniques. Rather, I would like to better understand the teacher perception of this issue. Thus, there are no right or wrong answers. I just want to hear your stories, understandings, and viewpoints of the issues, realities, and changes.

Today we are going to discuss statutory accountability demands. When I mention statutory accountability demands, I am suggesting accountability demands resulting from legislative action. Some of these statutory accountability demands can be found on the handout that I am placing in front of you (place page 4 of interview protocol in front of participant). You will see on this list that there are several statutory accountability demands that are a result of recent legislation. This list is not exhaustive, but it should provide you an idea of what statutory accountability demands we are facing as educators. Do you have any questions about the list?
As educators, we are often asked to self-reflect on who we are and what we believe in as practitioners. I am going to ask you to think about your own beliefs, behaviors, practices, and philosophies that underlie your own professional practice as an instructional leader. When we understand ourselves first, we are often able to understand others better.

Questions:
1. Let’s begin by talking about your instructional leadership beliefs. Tell me about your beliefs regarding student achievement. I am interested in learning about your perception of how a teacher affects student achievement. Can you provide me an example or tell me a story where this is illustrated?
   Probes:
   a) Can you respond to the statement…”when a student does better it is because a teacher exerted more effort”.
   b) Can you respond to the statement…”the influence of a student’s home experiences can be overcome with good teaching”.

2. As a teacher, describe your perceptions of the areas of instructional practice where you believe you have exceptional skills?
   Probes:
   a) Tell me your perceptions about your instructional skills.
   b) Can you describe the areas of professional growth that you perceive necessary for your instructional practice?
   c) Do you suggest professional development activities for yourself and other building staff members?

3. What is your perception of how you have been involved in decision-making in the school?
   Probes:
   a) Are there committees on which you sit in order to facilitate instructional decisions?
   b) Do you hold a leadership position in the school or on your grade level team?
   c) Can you provide me an example of how a decision that you were involved in making affected your instructional practice?

4. In your own instructional practice, describe how responsibility for learning is factored into the equation. Describe your perception of responsibility for learning as it relates to “for what purpose, to whom are you responsible, and how are you responsible”. Can you provide me an example of each?
   Probe:
   a) For what are you responsible as an instructional leader?
   b) To whom are you responsible as an instructional leader?
   c) How are you responsible as an instructional leader?
   d) What happens if you do not fulfill your responsibilities?

5. What is your perception of the district vision for instruction and student success? Is it a driving force behind your instructional practice?
   Probes:
   a) Does the district have a improvement plan and a vision for student achievement?
   b) Does the building have an improvement plan and a vision for student achievement?
c) Are your student achievement goals aligned?
d) What is the district trying to accomplish?

6. What is your perception of how best practices about teaching and learning are shared in the building?
   Probes:
   a) Do other teachers in the building turn to you with instructional problems or concerns?
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7. Do you perceive there to be a culture of trust in your school building? How has this developed? Can you provide me an example of how you know it exists?

8. Do you perceive there to be a collaborative culture in the school building? Can you tell me how you know this is the case?

9. When you glance at the list of statutory accountability demands that I provided you at the beginning of the interview, what has been your experience with any of these demands?
   Probes:
   a) What is your perception of these demands and what they mean?
   b) Does your school have any internal accountability demands?

10. Do you perceive that the accountability demands have affected your instructional practice? Can you tell me a story about how this is true?
    Probes:
    a) Have any of the accountability mandates improved your instructional practices?
    b) Have any of the accountability mandates negatively impacted your instructional practices?

11. Specifically thinking about expectations and consequences, what is your perception about your instructional leadership practices that are affected by accountability demands?
    Probes:
    a) What do you perceive has made your instructional leadership practices easier or more difficult?
    b) Do any of the accountability demands and possible changes resulting from them fit into your current teaching methodology?
    c) Do you believe that changing will be “worth it” in the end?

Final Question

1. Is there anything else that we have not talked about that you would like to share with me?

Closing
Thank you for your participation in this interview. Is it ok if I call you to follow-up on any questions that I may have after reviewing our interview?
Statutory Accountability Demands Examples

No Child Left Behind

Value Added (VA)

Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)

Annual Measurable Objectives (AMO)

Student Learning Objectives (SLO)

Ohio Teacher Evaluation System (OTES)

Student Growth Measures (SGM)

Third Grade Guarantee (TGG)

Reading Improvement & Monitoring Plan (RIMP)

Local Report Card (LRC)

Performance Index (PI)

Performance Indicators

Graduation Rate (4 year and 5 year)

College and Career Readiness

Next Generation of Assessments (PARCC)

Common Core Standards

New Learning Standards
APPENDIX E
INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

Title of Study: K-4 Teachers’ Perceptions of Teacher Instructional Leadership Practices

Introduction:
You are invited to participate in a research project being conducted by Shawna DeVoe, a doctoral student, in the Department of Education at The University of Akron.

Purpose:
The purpose of this study is to examine teacher perceptions of their own instructional leadership within a K-2, 3-4 building as a result of increased statutory accountability demands. This descriptive study will result in a description of the teacher perceptions of changes in their own instructional leadership practice as a result of increased accountability.

The researcher will conduct face-to-face interviews with eleven teachers in one school district.

Procedures:
This descriptive study involves the collection of data, through interviews, with regards to their perception of how accountability has affected their instructional leadership practice. A semi-structured one-on-one format will be utilized. All interviews will be recorded and transcribed for analysis. If additional questions arise during transcription, follow-up questions may be asked and answered via electronic mail or follow up interviews. It is anticipated that each interview will last approximately one hour.

Risks and Discomforts:
This research study is an exploration of teacher perceptions of instructional leadership practices occurring in school districts. The participants will only be asked questions regarding instructional leadership-related practices and behaviors. There are no anticipated physical, psychological, social, legal or economic risks.

Benefits:
You will receive no direct benefit from your participation in this study, but your participation may help us better understand instructional leadership practices in school districts.

Right to refuse or withdraw:
Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate or withdraw from this study at any time.
Anonymous and Confidential Data Collection:
All data will remain confidential. Subjects will not be identified by name, nor have any other identifying information in reports. All subjects will be referred to by pseudonyms, as will their districts. Any identifying information collected will be kept in a secure location and only the researchers will have access to the data. Participants will not be individually identified in any publication or presentation of the research results. Only aggregate data will be used. Your signed consent form will be kept separate from your data, and nobody will be able to link your responses to you.

Confidentiality of records:
All interviews will be recorded in order to be transcribed post-interview. The researcher will retain the recorder at all times. The researcher will also transcribe all data. All data sets will be coded, so there is no data to connect the interview with the subject. Data will be transcribed on researcher’s laptop computer which will remain at the researcher’s home in a locked location. All data will be stored on laptop computer, as well as backed up on a secure, password protected server. All data will remain confidential.

Audio and Video Taping:
All interviews will be recorded on a digital audio-recorder for later transcription. Once the study is complete, all digital audio data will be erased.

Who to contact with questions:
If you have any questions about this study, you may contact Shawna DeVoe, doctoral student and primary researcher, at shawna1@zips.uakron.edu or Sharon Kruse, Ph.D, advisor, at (330)972-8177. This project has been reviewed and approved by The University of Akron Institutional Review Board. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you may call the IRB at (330) 972-7666.

Acceptance & signature:
I have read the information provided above and all of my questions have been answered. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I will receive a copy of this consent form for my information.

____________________________                                           ____________________
Participant Signature                                           Date
## APPENDIX F

### CODEBOOK

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mnemonic</th>
<th>Short Description</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Inclusion Criteria</th>
<th>Exclusion Criteria</th>
<th>Typical Example</th>
<th>Atypical Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IL</td>
<td>Instructional Leadership</td>
<td>Characteristics that describe instructional leadership</td>
<td>Tasks, activities, individual characteristics.</td>
<td>Do not use this code in reference to athletic, or other leadership</td>
<td>Problem solver, curriculum adoption</td>
<td>Coach; student council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ILP</td>
<td>Practices</td>
<td>Specific practices that the leader believes assist with productive leadership</td>
<td>Use this code for leadership practices that the literature would prove to be associated with productive leadership</td>
<td>Do not use this code for leadership practices that would discourage quality instruction</td>
<td>Compliments staff, delegating; budget minded; leading others to take ownership</td>
<td>Not providing staff members the support they need to do their jobs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ILPB</td>
<td>Beliefs</td>
<td>Specific ways of thinking that guide the leader in making instructional leadership decisions</td>
<td>Use this code for any specific way of thinking that the literature would prove to be associated with productive leadership</td>
<td>Do not use this code for ways of thinking that would discourage quality instruction</td>
<td>Philosophy of education; specific content knowledge; learning values</td>
<td>Religious beliefs or beliefs about political topics other than education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ILPC</td>
<td>Curriculum</td>
<td>Specific ways of thinking that guide the leader in making instructional leadership decisions regarding curriculum</td>
<td>Use this code for any specific way of thinking about curriculum that the literature would prove to be associated with productive leadership</td>
<td>Do not use this code for ways of thinking that would discourage quality instruction</td>
<td>CCSS; implementing board adopted curriculum</td>
<td>Curriculum which is not taught to students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ILPBG</td>
<td>Tenure</td>
<td>Specific ways of thinking that guide the leader in making instructional leadership decisions based on time in position/education</td>
<td>Use this code for any specific way of thinking seemingly affected by time on the job, that the literature would prove to be associated with productive leadership</td>
<td>Do not use this code for ways of thinking that would discourage quality instruction</td>
<td>I only have two years in this position; I am the veteran member</td>
<td>I spent two years working in a factory in the summer; Teaching is a second career for me</td>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>ILPS</td>
<td>Skills</td>
<td>Specific practices that describe leader roles as they relate to instructional leadership</td>
<td>Use this code for skills mentioned in instructional leadership implementation</td>
<td>Do not use this code in reference to personal situations</td>
<td>Handing curriculum; problem solving educational dilemmas</td>
<td>Dealing with wife or children at home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ILPG</td>
<td>Growth</td>
<td>Specific practices that describe how a leader focuses on professional growth as it relates to instructional leadership</td>
<td>Use this code for practices that mention professional growth related to instructional leadership</td>
<td>Do not use this code in reference to growth that is not professional in nature</td>
<td>Helping to guide teachers or themselves in choosing professional development in areas of need</td>
<td>Dealing with fiscal growth at the school district or home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ILPD</td>
<td>Decisions</td>
<td>Specific practices that describe leader roles as they relate to decision making and instructional leadership</td>
<td>Use this code for practices that mention decision making related to instructional leadership</td>
<td>Do not use this code in reference to decisions made in personal situations outside of school</td>
<td>Helping to choose the math curriculum; serving as a member of the DLT</td>
<td>What to have for dinner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ILPR</td>
<td>Responsibility</td>
<td>Specific characteristics or roles that an instructional leader must fulfill in order to improve student achievement</td>
<td>Use this code for any characteristics/roles that assist in deterring a system of student improvement</td>
<td>Do not use this code for traits or skills that an individual has that would be considered a skill</td>
<td>Teaching the required curriculum; meeting the expectations of parents</td>
<td>Knowing how to teach science</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ILPRW</td>
<td>For What Responsible</td>
<td>Specific characteristics or roles that an instructional leader must fulfill in order to improve student achievement</td>
<td>Use this code for any characteristics/roles that identify what an instructional leader is responsible for</td>
<td>Do not use this code for characteristics/roles that an instructional leader would not be responsible for</td>
<td>Teaching the required curriculum; meeting student needs</td>
<td>Making dinner at right; Taking time for snack breaks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mnemonic</td>
<td>Short Description</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>ILPRWH</td>
<td>To Whom Responsible</td>
<td>Specific individuals to whom an instructional leader is accountable in order to improve student achievement</td>
<td>Use this code for any individuals to whom an instructional leader is responsible</td>
<td>Do not use this code for individuals for whom an instructional leader would not be responsible</td>
<td>Administrator; students; parents</td>
<td>Family members at home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ILPRH</td>
<td>How Responsible</td>
<td>Means by which an instructional leader is held accountable in order to improve student achievement</td>
<td>Use this code for any reasons that the instructional leader mentions as to how held responsible</td>
<td>Do not use this code for reasons that would not hold an instructional leader responsible</td>
<td>Test scores; evaluations</td>
<td>Signing contracts; making doctor appointments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ILPRC</td>
<td>Consequences</td>
<td>Specific consequences that occur as a result of not fulfilling responsibilities</td>
<td>Use this code for any consequences mentioned resulting from not meeting expectations</td>
<td>Do not use this code for consequences resulting from not meeting responsibilities in personal lives</td>
<td>Could be fired; Can have change in job placement</td>
<td>Can have home foreclosed for not paying mortgage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ILC</td>
<td>Capacity</td>
<td>Characteristics that describe leader roles/practices as they relate to ability to exert instructional leadership</td>
<td>Use this code for any leadership practices/roles that the literature would prove to be associated with the ability to be a productive instructional leader</td>
<td>Do not use this code for leadership practices that would be associated with individuals who would not be leaders in instruction</td>
<td>Providing vision for staff members; demonstrating shared leadership or shared decision making; collaboration; trust</td>
<td>Staying late to watch a game after school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ILCV</td>
<td>Vision</td>
<td>Specific statements that build a reason to practice instructional leadership</td>
<td>Use this code for any statements that mention reasons, goals, etc. For the district/school</td>
<td>Do not use this code for statements that would not assist the district/school in accomplishing a goal</td>
<td>Setting goals; strategic plan; yearly meetings</td>
<td>Deciding to do something at a later time; procrastination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>ILCS</td>
<td>Sharing</td>
<td>Traits, practices, characteristics that identify instructional leadership is supported by others</td>
<td>Use this code for any traits, practices, characteristics that identify instructional leadership is supported by others</td>
<td>Do not use this code for sharing other resources</td>
<td>Sharing instructional practices in meetings; team meetings; team leaders</td>
<td>Sharing lunches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ILGT</td>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>Specific confidence between workers</td>
<td>Use this code for specific characteristics, traits, practices that depict confidence between workers</td>
<td>Do not use this code in reference to situations where confidence is not built or lost</td>
<td>Social gatherings because of friendships; ability to share confidence in one another to take risks</td>
<td>Meeting after school where they talked about professional development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ILCC</td>
<td>Collaboration</td>
<td>Characteristics that depict workers in situations where they are working together toward a common goal</td>
<td>Use this code for characteristics that describe instructional leaders in situations where they are working together toward a common goal</td>
<td>Do not use this code for situations where teachers are working individually</td>
<td>Team meetings; DLT</td>
<td>Individual professional development attendance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ILD</td>
<td>Demands-Accountability</td>
<td>Specific demands that are required by the federal government for accountability purposes.</td>
<td>Use this code for statutory accountability demands as a result of legislation</td>
<td>Do not use this code in reference to school district mandates</td>
<td>CTES, NCLB, SLOs</td>
<td>Title I</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX G

IRB APPROVAL LETTER

June 8, 2012

Shawna DeVoe
4731 Haughton Ct.
Stow, Ohio 44224

From: Sharon McWhorter, IRB Administrator

Re: IRB Number 20120602 "An Examination of the Instructional Leadership Practices in School Districts"

Thank you for submitting your Exemption Request for the referenced study. Your request was approved on June 8, 2012. The protocol represents minimal risk to subjects and matches the following federal category for exemption:

☐ Exemption 1 – Research conducted in established or commonly accepted educational settings, involving normal educational practices.

☒ Exemption 2 – Research involving the use of educational tests, survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior.

☐ Exemption 3 – Research involving the use of educational tests, survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior not exempt under category 2, but subjects are elected or appointed public officials or candidates for public office.

☐ Exemption 4 – Research involving the collection or study of existing data, documents, records, pathological specimens, or diagnostic specimens.

☐ Exemption 6 – Research and demonstration projects conducted by or subject to the approval of department or agency heads, and which are designed to study, evaluate, or otherwise examine public programs or benefits.

☐ Exemption 6 – Taste and food quality evaluation and consumer acceptance studies.

Annual continuation applications are not required for exempt projects. If you make changes to the study’s design or procedures that increase the risk to subjects or include activities that do not fall within the approved exemption category, please contact me to discuss whether or not a new application must be submitted. Any such changes or modifications must be reviewed and approved by the IRB prior to implementation.

Please retain this letter for your files. This office will hold your exemption application for a period of three years from the approval date. If you wish to continue this protocol beyond this period, you will need to submit another Exemption Request. If the research is being conducted for a master’s thesis or doctoral dissertation, the student must file a copy of this letter with the thesis or dissertation.

☑ Approved consent forms/enclosed

Cc: Sharon Kruse - Advisor
Cc: Stephanie Woods - IRB Chair

The University of Akron is an Equal Education and Employment Institution

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