SANCTIONS: EXPLORING THE PERCEPTIONS OF URBAN SCHOOL PRINCIPALS ON NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND (NCLB) AFTER SUCCESSFULLY TURNING AROUND LOW-PERFORMING SCHOOLS

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SANCTIONS: EXPLORING THE PERCEPTIONS OF URBAN SCHOOL
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Abstract
This qualitative case study explored the experiences of two principals at two urban school
districts in Ohio during the No Child Left Behind era. Each principal was affected by
NCLB sanctions yet successfully turned around a low-performing school. Critical Race
Theory and Social Learning Theory were used as the conceptual frameworks. The case
study involved six semi-structured interviews, as well as the use of survey questionnaires
along with the collection of archival data. The intent of this study was to (1) investigate
the impact of school sanctions on communities from the perspective of practitioners in
urban settings who successfully transformed schools in the era of school accountability
and (2) investigate the financial implications of NCLB sanctions on public schools.
DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my grandmothers, mother, wife, and family friends who have supported me along this journey.

I would also like to dedicate this dissertation to Margaret from Cohort 15, may she rest in peace. Thank you for the support, encouragement, and the motivation to press forward toward the mark of a higher calling.
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CHAPTER I

Introduction

The headline on the front page of the *Canton Repository* in April of 2011 read “Goodbye Hartland Middle School Hello Ohio’s First Early College Middle School.” I was the head principal at Hartland Middle School at the time. A photo of me wearing a yellow and blue argyle sweater vest standing at a podium pleading with school board members to keep my school open was printed on the front page below the headline. The photo also showed several parents and community members in the background standing and clapping in agreement with my plea to keep my school open. The pleading proved to be futile as the board voted unanimously to close the middle school 5-0.

My staff and I were devastated. We had just completed our first day of the Ohio Achievement Tests. Our students were prepared. Our students were ready; we had worked all year to prepare them for the state tests. We were motivating students to excel, exposing them to the opportunities a quality education afforded them in spite of their current circumstances. Our school had a 97% free and reduced lunch rate (*Ohio Department of Education Local Report Card, 2010-2011*). In addition, our middle school was in School Improvement status year 7. As a result, half the staff and the prior principals were reassigned in 2008 for poor academic performance and failing to make Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) for over seven years. My staff and I were assigned to Hartland due to the reconstitution for the 2008-2009 year. In the middle of our third year together and during state testing week, the board decided unanimously they had enough and voted to close the school.
Reconstitution of staff and removal of principals were two of the many sanctions imposed on buildings failing to make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) under the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB). The closing of our middle school and the monumental performance of our students on the Ohio Achievement Test during the 2010-11 school years were catalyst for my desire to research the impact of NCLB sanctions on urban schools and communities. This study explored the experiences and perceptions of two principals in Ohio Big Eight Urban Districts affected by NCLB sanctions.

The purpose of this research was to investigate the effect of NCLB sanctions on urban school systems in Ohio from the perspective of principals who have turned around low-performing schools where NCLB sanctions were imposed. This chapter served to provide the researcher’s reasoning for this investigation as well as provide the reader with previous research on this topic. This chapter contains the statement of the problem, the purpose of the research, the research question, and finally the significance of the study. The introduction also includes the conceptual and theoretical frameworks utilized to support the researcher’s understanding of the research problem. These conceptual frameworks include Critical Race Theory and Social Learning Theory. I explored and introduced a concept of Savior Leadership versus the much-researched Servant Leadership. Finally, this chapter provided an understanding of the reasons for the research, the theorist who has reviewed this topic, and a summary of why this researcher investigated the problem of NCLB sanctions’ impact on urban school systems from the lens of principals.
Statement of the Problem

The Improving America’s School Act introduced the concept of holding schools accountable for school performance (Herman et al., 2008). This legislation encouraged states to assess if schools were making academic progress in reading and math from grades 3 through 10 with all students. Although the Improving America’s School Act launched the trend for school accountability in academic progress, it did not carry intensive sanctions or ramifications for schools that did not improve. According to Herman et al. (2008), The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 changed the accountability of schools dramatically by requiring a regimen of annual testing in grades 3 through 8 and imposed severe sanctions on schools that failed to make adequate yearly progress heretofore referred to as (AYP). As a result of NCLB sanctions’ effect on predominately minority and low-income schools and communities, I decided to investigate urban principals’ perceptions of NCLB sanctions after a successful school transformation.

The need to investigate the impact of NCLB sanctions’ catalyst came from my experiences in turning around low-performing schools, yet see them closed, reconstituted, or renamed after a successful school turnaround. Why would the state or the local education agency close schools that demonstrated academic growth and achievement? Why would the sanctions designed to enhance the educational options for students attending a low-performing school end up providing the unintended consequence of seeing the principal removed after turnaround, substantial amount of school funding go to charter schools, or the school closed despite the school’s current level of academic
performance? These problems and questions became the motivation for this qualitative study and provided me with a dilemma to investigate.

The intent of the research was to expand on the current literature in the field, and provide qualitative case study research to support an in-depth understanding from urban school practitioners on strategy to inform policy makers and practitioners. In addition, my intentions were to address the (NCLB) sanctions for low-performing schools and the perceptions of principals who have successfully turned around these schools. This study expands the current literature by providing state, federal, and local policy actors with research from practitioners who have successfully taken low-performing schools and transformed them into high-performing schools in the NCLB era of sanctions, and accountability.

**Purpose of the Study**

Although there are studies that address urban principals and the perceived impact of change in principal leadership (Ishimaru, 2013; Myers, 2012; Terosky, 2014) and the abundance of research on NCLB and the accountability movement (Darling-Hammond, Willout, & Pittenger, 2014; Muhammad, 2009; Ravitch, 2013), there is limited research on the perspective of NCLB sanctions from the lens of principals who have successfully turned around a failing school. Nor is there much research on the principals’ perceptions of the NCLB sanctions impact on the communities they serve once the transformation has occurred. This study contributes to the body of knowledge on NCLB sanctions and expands on the literature addressing the perceived impact of NCLB by providing policy actors and practitioners with in-depth knowledge regarding a broken system—a system of sanctions that have disproportionately affected urban school settings.
According to Herman et al. (2008), “In 2006-2007, 70% of 98,905 schools nationwide (64,546) made adequate yearly progress; 10,676 schools were designated as schools in need of improvement, and 2,302 schools were designated as schools in need of improvement restructuring” (p. 5). *Turning Around Chronically Low-Performing Schools*, a study conducted for the U.S. Department of Education by Herman et al. (2008), defined “turnaround schools” as schools with chronically poor performers with a high proportion of their students (generally 20% or more) failing to meet state standards for proficiency in math and reading over two or more consecutive years. The schools defined as turnaround buildings, according to Herman et al. (2008), were schools that increased student achievement in no more than three years. These schools made substantial gains of at least 10 points in the proportion of students failing to meet state proficiency standards or lowering the dropout rates by 10% or more.

For the purpose of this study, the Herman et al. (2008) definition for school turnaround was used as a means to set the criteria for selecting principals. My criteria for selecting research participants focused on principals and staffs from schools in Ohio that have moved from Academic Emergency (F) or from Academic Watch (D) to the Effective (B) ratings using Ohio’s Local Report Card Performance Index ratings in three or less years. The Performance Index measured the academic achievement of every student tested in each school. Students test scores were categorized into five levels: limited, basic, proficient, advanced, and accelerated (Ohio Department of Education Local Report Card, 2013).

According to the Ohio Department of Education (2015) *Understanding Ohio’s Local Report Card*, The Performance Index measures the achievement of every student,
not just whether or not he or she reaches “proficient.” Schools receive points for every student’s level of achievement. The higher the students’ levels, the more points the school earns toward its index. The point system rewards schools and districts that improve the performance of their highest and lowest performing students. The Performance Index calculation was used to determine school ratings (see Appendix A for Ohio Performance Index calculation method).

The need for this research was precipitated by data suggesting that we continue to have significant academic achievement gaps between White and Black students, along with limited to stagnant student growth under NCLB (Ravitch, 2013). While the need for education and increased accountability are paramount in America, Muhammad (2009) suggested,

Education has traditionally been viewed as the best route for social mobility but for some young people this route is not accessible. An abundance of data on the costs of this failure of our educational system show the system is absolutely broken. (p. 5)

In addition, the need for this research was supported by Haberman (2003) who stated, “an American student who has been officially labeled handicapped in some way which prevents him/her from learning has a better chance of graduating from high school than a student of color in one of America’s major urban schools” (Herman et al., 2008).

**Research Question**

For the purpose of this qualitative research case study, the question used to guide this study was, “How have NCLB sanctions affected schools, communities, and staffs in urban districts from the perspective of the principal?” The emphasis was on the
perceptions of urban principals who have successfully turned around low-performing buildings as defined by Herman et al. (2008) and the Ohio Department of Education Performance Index rating system.

**Significance of the Study**

The majority of the schools defined as chronically underperforming in Ohio are urban schools with high poverty rates and predominately minority populations. According to Crouse (2012), in July 2011, the Associated Press released statistics claiming that the recent economic problems in the United States have significantly increased the wealth gap between Caucasians, African Americans, and Hispanics. Data show that the median wealth of Caucasian families was $113,149 in 2009. At the same time, it was $6,325 for Hispanics, and just $5,677 for Black families. Poverty continues to plague students of color in urban schools as the median wealth gap demonstrates. In addition to the wealth gap indicator, many of our urban schools are filled with predominately minority students. A segregated system has emerged.

The segregated schools researched by Cremin (1988), Darling-Hammond (2007), Maxwell (2014), and Muhammad (2009) are just a few of the concerns along with poverty that affect the instructional atmosphere of urban principals. According to Sable and Hoffman (2005), in 2003 over 46% of the students in the largest 100 school districts were eligible for free and reduced lunch (p. 29). This qualitative research case study on NCLB sanctions from the perspective of urban principals who have successfully turned around low-performing schools, in spite of NCLB imposed consequences, enhanced current theory provided insight on how these principals turned around their schools against the odds. I explored and investigated the principals’ perceptions on the process
and the impact on the community, staff, and students after the successful school turnaround. This qualitative case study demonstrated systemic flaws in the No Child Left Behind ESEA waiver sanctions policy. The research provided information to support making policy changes to enhance educational options for urban students. Options, which may actually be limited as the espoused values of NCLB sanctions, have produced intended or unintended consequences for minority students in urban schools. Students may have choice. Yet, where is the choice when the district as a whole is failing according to the state? A large percentage of the Ohio Big Eight districts have multiple schools impacted by the sanctions. As a result, the choices are limited and charter schools have not shown significant growth, either.

Conceptual Framework

Critical Race Theory

When determining a conceptual framework to set the context of the research, I looked at the research question, “How have NCLB sanctions impacted schools, communities, and staffs in low-income and urban districts?” My choice of conceptual framework coincided with my experiences and observations in urban education settings. As an urban educator for over 24 years, I began to find two schools of thought regarding leadership. These schools of thought, based on my observations and experience, led me to develop two categories of educators. The two educator categories I developed were the Savior or the Servant educator. The savior mentality educator comes into urban education with a desire to save poor African American urban children from their undesirable circumstances. The savior works from a mentality of assimilation. Integration is a question of African American students assimilating to the larger society. When the savior
meets with frustration or inability to reach the students he or she serves, they develop a persona of “Many are called but the chosen are few” (Matthew 20:16, KJV). I have done my part- but the students and families were not receptive.

On the other end is the servant educator who accepts the current experiences and circumstances of the students from a strengths model, not a deficit model. The servant works each day to make the lessons relevant to the cultural identity of the students in front of them. The servant works diligently each year to enhance their skills and make education connect to their students’ realities. The servant works more from a school of accommodation in which they work to demonstrate the frequent advantages a quality education provides through service and sacrifice. “I came not that the righteous might be saved but that the unrighteous” (Matthew 9:13, KJV). I came to serve all.

Throughout this study I worked to use critical race theory and social learning theory as the framework for understanding the experiences and perceptions and investigated the impact of NCLB sanctions on urban school principals. The critical race theory provided me the ability to align my two categories using a conceptual framework. The questions and the population I researched align closely with the critical race perspective. According to Ravitch (2013), significant academic achievement gaps continue to exist between White and Black students in the NCLB era. Haberman (2003) also supported the use of the critical race perspective suggesting a student with an individual education plan (IEP) has a better chance of completing high school than a student of color.

As a result, I determined the critical theorist framework fit best with my research question. According to Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011), two main strands have emerged
from the critical theorist conceptual framework. The strand that resonated with my research was the social justice approach. “Critical theorists are weary of notions of absolute truth and base their concerns on the historical inequities produced by this rigid view of knowledge” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 20).

In addition, my conceptual framework selection was impacted by the readings of Bell (1980). Bell discussed the concept of interest convergence. Bell (1980) insinuated when a dilemma or crisis is of interest to the well-being of Whites, they will show an interest and be willing to work toward a convergent point for both races keeping their own interest at the forefront. Yet, if there is no point of interest to converge, then the issue continues to be plagued by race and a non-factor in White Americans’ minds. With the implementation of the NCLB public school choice sanction, charter schools emerged. Once the public school choice sanction was implemented, for-profit charter schools emerged disrupting the monopoly of public education and provided an open market for entrepreneurs willing to start up schools using public dollars to support them. According to William Phillis in the Ohio Education and Adequacy Report (2016), Ohio has spent over seven billion dollars on charter schools; in addition, the Walton Foundation announced allocating one billion dollars to expand privately operated charters (Jackson, 2016).

The convergence of interest concept as described by Bell (1980) was utilized throughout this research as I explored the perceptions of principals on the financial implications of NCLB sanctions and the cost to local school districts. Bell is one of the fathers of critical race theory and his convergence of interest concept provides points of
interest to review while investigating the financial effect of NCLB sanctions on urban school districts.

Another main reason for the choice of critical race theory as a conceptual framework was the resegregation of students that has emerged in public schools since the inception of NCLB and public school choice. Many of the school districts affected by the sanctions are predominately minority schools. According to Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, and Thomas (1996), Critical Race Theory or (CRT) examines the entire edifice of contemporary legal thought and doctrine from the viewpoint of laws’ roles in constructing and maintaining social domination of subordination, by challenging basic assumptions of prevailing paradigms among mainstream liberals and conservatives. Crenshaw et al. suggested Critical Race Theory serves as the political and intellectual challenge of prevailing ideological views addressing the role of deep-seated racism in America. At its nucleus, CRT’s foundation serves as the conceptual frame of understanding how a regime of White supremacy and subordination of people of color have been created and maintained in America and not just understand this premise but seek to change it. (Crenshaw et al., 1996, p. xiii)

In addition, Ledesma and Calderon (2015) provided a meta-analysis of Critical Race Theory in education. The meta-analysis provided support for the use of CRT in education. Ledesma and Calderon (2015) stated, “CRT is used to locate how race and racism manifest themselves throughout the K-12 pipeline, and more importantly offers us tools that allow us to engage these issues in the context of policy” (p. 207). Ledesma and Calderon (2015) also said, “Research that utilizes Critical Race Theory to examine public policy in education has demonstrated policy and school finance impact communities of
color in disparate ways” (p. 212). With the case study focused on school principals working in Ohio Big Eight Urban districts affected most heavily by NCLB sanctions and policy, Critical Race Theory provided a foundation as the lens or conceptual framework for this study.

A theme of social justice has influenced this research. The NCLB policy and sanctions embedded in the policy are required for schools receiving federal funds. The policy and process used to enact the law have contributed to the current academic and economic gaps seen in America and this influenced my thoughts. Recognizing this motivated me to use member checking for reviewing transcriptions and to include non-minority participants along with African Americans for this research study. In addition to the member checking of transcriptions from interviews and White and minority urban principals’ perspectives, the researcher used questionnaires to assist with triangulation of the data as well.

**Social Learning Theory**

In addition to the Critical Race Theory conceptual framework, a second conceptual framework emerged in this research. Albert Bandura introduced and developed the Social Learning Theory in 1963. The concept of social learning theory was introduced to address human behavior and motivation (Bandura, 1977). While trying to understand the reasons for individual actions and behavior, Bandura (1986) suggested that individuals are more likely to adopt a modeled behavior if it results in outcomes they value. Emulation is most likely to occur if the model of the behavior is similar to the observer and the model has admired status.
Furthermore, Bandura (1986) suggested that most human behavior is learned observationally through modeling. If the observed behaviors produce the desired results, they serve as our guide. One of the most enlightening aspects of the theory is the suggestion that the further an individual group is from the macro society, the less impact the macro society values have on the group.

This theoretical framework, in the researcher’s perspective, had substantial implications when looking at poor and minority children in urban settings. The modeling of behavior and the lack of access to middle class norms influence perceptions, behaviors, and concept of emulation. The further away individuals are from the macro society the less influence their norms have (Bandura, 1977). The middle-class society deferred gratification concept of educational attainment as means of upward mobility and NCLB sanctions focus on proficient test scores and do not align with the norms of the environment where many urban students live; thus the savior mentality educator works for students to assimilate, often failing to establish relationships because of the macro versus micro society norms. The servant educator works from the lens of accommodation versus assimilation. The servant leader understands that each student’s experience is unique. The servant educator’s understanding of the macro society norms versus the micro society lens is used to challenge the students by setting high expectations for his or her students. This requires the servant to be willing to establish strong relationships based on connecting with his or her students. The leader of the school must set the tone and expose urban students to the larger society while embracing the current environment in which the students live. Thus, a parent’s educational attainment often affects the children unless exposed to someone who is admired or producing outcomes the student values.
Furthermore, a large percentage of the teachers serving in urban educational settings do not look like the population of students they serve. According to Douglas, Lewis, Douglas, Scott, and Garrison-Wade (2008), 87% of the United States elementary and secondary teachers are White, while only 8% are Black. Social Learning Theory discussion on macro society norms versus micro society norms was one of the reasons I used Bandura’s theory as an additional conceptual framework.

In like manner, I reviewed yet another report discussing teacher disparities. This review looked at male versus female teachers’ influences. A large percentage of the teachers responsible for implementing the state curriculum and teaching in America, according to the NCES USDOE 2013 School Staffing Report, are White females making up 89% of the primary grade educators. In addition, according to this report, of the 3.85 million teachers in America, 82.7% are White. Blacks make up less than 6% of the total teaching force. In Ohio, Livingston (2015) stated, “Of the 356 charter and public school districts enrolling Black students over one half have no Black teachers.” According to Education Week commentary article written by Donald Nicholas (2014), “Where are the Black Male Teachers?” African American males make up less than 2% of the United States teachers in all settings both urban and rural. Bandura (1986) has suggested that in order to teach someone a teacher must first gain his or her attention. Those who share common characteristics most readily gain attention. As NCLB sanctions are imposed on schools based on state testing scores and AYP, it is important to determine how much impact teachers have. Bandura (1986) suggested through Social Learning Theory the further away a person is from the macro society, the less impact it has on motivation and behaviors. These numbers, along with the theoretical perspectives, may have a
tremendous impact on the perceptions of teachers in urban settings, further contributing to the achievement gaps through unexpected consequences due to lack of diversity and teacher beliefs.

**Definitions**

**Academic Emergency**: The lowest of the five categories on the ODE report cards which include: Excellent, Effective, Continuous Improvement, Academic Watch, and Emergency. The rating is based on student performance on the state assessment based on the performance index. Academic Emergency is equivalent to an F rating and provides opportunities for students attending a school in Academic Emergency to utilize Ed. Choice dollars. A rating of academic emergency traditionally equates with high proportions of students performing below grade level proficiency on state assessments.

**Academic Watch**: Academic Watch is the second to the lowest ratings on the Ohio Department of Education Local School Report Card. Academic Watch is equivalent to a D rating on the current Ohio Department of Education Report Card. Students in buildings rated in Academic Emergency or Watch for two out of three years are eligible for school choice and Ed. Choice scholarships. A rating of Academic Watch traditionally equates to a high proportion of students performing below grade level proficiency on state assessments.

**Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)**: An individual state's measure of yearly progress toward achieving state academic standards. "Adequate Yearly Progress" is the minimum level of improvement that states, school districts, and schools must achieve each year.
Charter Schools: Charter schools are independent public schools designed and operated by educators, parents, community leaders, educational entrepreneurs, and others. They are sponsored by designated local or state educational organizations who monitor their quality and effectiveness, but allow them to operate outside of the traditional system of public schools.

Educational Choice Vouchers: The Ed Choice Scholarship Program provides up to 60,000 state-funded scholarships to students who attend low-performing public school buildings. The scholarship must be used to attend private schools that meet requirements for program participation.

Effective: The effective rating on a school report card in Ohio is equivalent to a B rating and was the second highest rating a school or district could receive up to 2012. The Ohio Department of Education moved to letter grades for 2012-2013 and beyond. The effective rating is based on the performance index scores limited, basic, proficient, accelerated, and advanced calculated ratings of student performance on the Ohio Achievement Assessment in a school or district. The more students rated proficient and above, the higher the probability of an Effective or Excellent rating.

Elementary and Secondary Education Act, 1964: ESEA, which was first enacted in 1965, is the principal federal law affecting K-12 education. The No Child Left Behind Act is the most recent reauthorization of the ESEA (https://www2.ed.gov/).

No Child Left Behind (NCLB): An act to close the achievement gap with accountability, flexibility, and choice so that no child is left behind. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) was a U.S. Act of Congress which reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act; it included Title I provisions applying to
disadvantaged students. It supported standards-based education reform based on the premise that setting high standards and establishing measurable goals could improve individual outcomes in education (https://www2.ed.gov/).

**Ohio Big Eight Urban Districts:** The Ohio Big Eight Urban Districts consist of Akron, Canton, Cleveland, Columbus, Cincinnati, Dayton, Toledo, and Youngstown.

**Performance Index Rating:** This measure rewards the achievement of every student, not just those who score proficient or higher. Districts and schools earn points based on how well each student does on all tested subjects in grades 3-8 and the 10th-grade Ohio Graduation Test.

**Race to the Top (RTTP): R2T, RTTT or RTT,** is a $4.35 billion United States Department of Education competitive grant created to spur and reward innovation and reforms in state and local district K-12 education. It is funded by the ED Recovery Act as part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 and was announced by President Barack Obama and Secretary of Education Arne Duncan on July 25, 2009. States were awarded points for satisfying certain educational policies, such as performance-based evaluations for teachers and principals based on multiple measures of educator effectiveness (and are tied to targeted professional development and feedback), adopting common standards (though adoption of the Common Core State Standards was not required), adoption of policies that do not prohibit (or effectively prohibit) the expansion of high-quality charter schools, turning around the lowest-performing schools, and building and using data systems (https://www2.ed.gov/).

**School Choice:** Students in schools identified as in need of improvement have the option to transfer to better public schools in their districts. The school districts will be
required to provide transportation to the students. Priority is given to low-income students.

**School Improvement Grant (SIG):** School Improvement Grants (SIGs), authorized under section 1003(g) of Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), are grants to state educational agencies (SEAs) that SEAs use to make competitive subgrants to local educational agencies (LEAs) that demonstrate the greatest need for the funds and the strongest commitment to use the funds to provide adequate resources in order to substantially raise the achievement of students in their lowest-performing schools (https://www2.ed.gov/).

**School Improvement Status- At Risk:** refers to a school or district that has failed to make adequate yearly progress for one year

**School Improvement Status:** Districts and schools move into improvement status after missing AYP for two years.

**Subgroup:** There are 10 student groups evaluated for AYP goals in reading and mathematics in every school or district where at least 30 tested students (aggregated across all tested grades) are in that group. Student groups are All students, Black, Non-Hispanic Native American, Asian/Pacific Islander, Hispanic, Multi-Racial, White, Non-Hispanic Economically Disadvantaged, Limited English Proficient, Students with disabilities.

**Title I:** Title I refers to programs aimed at America's most disadvantaged students. Title I, Part A provides assistance to improve the teaching and learning of children in high-poverty schools to enable those children to meet challenging state
academic content and performance standards. Title I reaches about 12.5 million students enrolled in both public and private schools (https://www2.ed.gov/).

**Researcher’s Lens**

The state of our public school system, segregation in our schools, and educational inequalities as they relate to academic achievement for Black children have been areas of concern for me for most of my educational career. The Hartline Middle School dilemma provided a catalyst for this study. I served two years in central office prior to moving to Hartline Middle School. I served as the director of pupil services and first director of school improvement in my Ohio Big Eight Urban District. After these two years, I requested to return to a school building. I missed the children and the day-to-day interactions. My experiences as a principal were very gratifying and provided me with an inner peace along with a sense of satisfaction as I watched children grow academically and mature into young adults.

Once my request to return to a school building as a principal was approved, I was assigned to the lowest-performing middle school in Stark County. The school is in one of Ohio’s Big Eight Urban Districts. The district has over 20 schools. Stark County has over 17 school districts. My school was in the largest of the 17 school districts. In three years, the school moved from the lowest performance rating (Academic Emergency) to one of the highest performing (Effective) based on the performance index. The school moved from number 20 in the district to one of the top five. The staff and community worked together collectively to increase student achievement and change the school’s culture.

The staff and I thought the tremendous gains would be embraced, but what happened was the exact opposite. The school was closed and re-opened under another
name and the student population dwindled. I was reassigned to a sister school in the
district. All this occurred under the auspices of NCLB sanctions for low-performing
schools. My thoughts centered on “was this the intended outcome anyway?” These
experiences prompted me to study the effect of NCLB sanctions from the perspective of
urban principals who have turned around low-performing schools while addressing
NCLB sanctions.

Once I left my former Ohio Big Eight District and started work in Cuyahoga
County, I assumed the role of Director of Curriculum and Instruction. I was responsible
for implementing the state common core curriculum. The state achievement tests are
based on common core curriculum. State test scores are used as a basis to determine
school rankings, and the lower the performance on state tests, the lower the school and
district rating. The lower the performance and rating, as well as the length of time with
low ratings and performance, the more NCLB sanctions are imposed.

What I found in the role of Curriculum Director was a curriculum devoid of any
significant curriculum addressing the contributions of African Americans in literacy;
science, American history or math; yet the majority of the students in my new district
were also African American. My new district in Cuyahoga County was also struggling to
increase their state performance. This district, considered suburban urban, was also
addressing NCLB sanctions. School choice, private school vouchers, and financial
resources were being allocated to charter and parochial schools for students leaving the
district. These are allowable allocations and legal sanctions under NCLB. All these
experiences have influenced my research lens.
Shenton (2004) suggested, “Many critics are reluctant to accept the trustworthiness of qualitative research” (p. 63). In order to avoid this pitfall regarding the trustworthiness of qualitative research and my personal experiences in urban school districts, every effort was made to use reflexivity, member checking, and reviewing my notes for coding purposes to assist with conformability and credibility. Shenton (2004) suggested member checks and progressive subjectivity are activities used to assist with credibility as I looked at my research lens.

The goal of this case study was to expand the existing literature and provide in-depth interviews with urban principals who have successfully turned around low-performing schools. The urban school districts are heavily impacted by NCLB sanctions and are increasingly more segregated. As opposed to providing choices for low-income students and minority students, Orfield (2014) stated, “What we’ve seen over the past two decades is a slow but steady increase in the isolation of Black and Latino students; there is double segregation of race and poverty” (as cited in Long, 2014, p. 31). Are the espoused values of a quality education for all students and leaving no child behind providing enacted values that are actually widening the achievement gaps as a result of the NCLB sanctions? These are but a few of the questions resonating with me as a researcher. I kept copious notes and used strategies suggested by Shenton (2004) for trustworthiness in research.

**Summary**

In summary, thus far I have found that the current research and literature on NCLB, sanctions, accountability, and provisions traditionally start with addressing the history of education in America and the purpose of education. The research then moves
to the foundation of why the NCLB law was drafted and how the sanctions were meant to help urban students. There is limited research from practitioners who have addressed the sanctions of low-performing schools and successfully turned these schools around. There is even less research asking the practitioner’s perspective on the NCLB act after successful transformations.

The vast majority of literature starts with a question. Many educators and historians have asked, “What is the purpose of the American school?” Ravitch (2013) suggested that the purpose of schools is greater than democracy and meeting public agendas. Ravitch stated, in her view, that public schools are rooted in their communities. They exist to serve the children of the communities. Anthony Muhammad (2009) suggested that for over a century educators, politicians, and citizens debated the purpose of public education. It has traditionally been viewed as the best route for social mobility, but for some this route is not accessible.

The current literature proposed the purpose of education can be vague. Eder (2008) suggested that schools should exist for decision-making and democracy and to assist citizens in learning what they need to earn a living. Eder also stated, “our citizens have to go to school in order to be furnished with the instruments needed to understand the arguments of our opponents if you are from the school of Paulo Freire, 1971” (Eder, 2008, p. 26). Yet some researchers have a more definitive opinion of the purpose of education. The Afro-centric perspective provided by Shujaa (1994) suggested that American people of African descent are caught in a tumultuous paradox. When it comes to education and acquisition of life giving and sustaining knowledge, the population is
absent in the text. “Too many of our children are trapped in urban schools that have been programmed for failure” (Shujaa, 1994, p. 1).

Although there are various opinions on the purpose of public education (Eder, 2008; Muhammad, 2009; Ravitch, 2013; Shujaa, 1994), as citizens of this country, education is a right. All American citizens are afforded the right to a free public education, and laws such as the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 have impacted the current state of our educational system as well as the NCLB Act (Darling-Hammond et al., 2014). In addition to looking at the purpose of education, my research found a plethora of information on the historical segregation of America’s schools.

Darling-Hammond (2007) suggested that 50 years after Brown v. Board of Education, the United States has become accustomed to educational inequalities and our educational achievement gaps are still large. The educational inequalities are exacerbated when we look at the geographic locations of minority students. Darling-Hammond (2007) addressed this in her studies by finding that African American and Hispanic students are concentrated in central city public schools. Many become majority “minority.” Today 69% of the largest 100 school districts consist of predominately minority students according to Sable and Hoffman (as cited in Darling-Hammond, 2007, p. 320).

The segregated school system addressed by Darling-Hammond (2007) is not new. According to Cremin (1988), “In 1946-47 seventeen states and the District of Columbia still required separate schools for blacks and whites by law; 12 states specifically forbade the segregation of students on the basis of race and 14 states were silent on the matter” (p. 257). In addition to the research of Cremin (1988), Darling-Hammond (2007), and Sable and Hoffman (2005), other researchers have suggested that segregation in urban school
districts is getting worse, which affects the demographic population urban principals serve. How NCLB sanctions have affected urban school finances, principals, teachers, students, and communities is becoming a perplexing question. It provided me with a unique topic and or phenomenon to investigate and provide ideas for extended study. Were the espoused values of leaving no child behind and providing choice for students in underperforming schools truly values? My hope is that this qualitative case study of two Big Eight Urban school principals provides information to expand on current research and motivate others to pursue future studies.
CHAPTER II

Review of Literature

The purpose of this research was to explore urban principals’ perceptions on the impact of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) sanctions for low-performing schools. This research explored the perceptions of two Ohio Big Eight Urban District school principals. The research question was “How have NCLB sanctions affected their staff, students, and community after successfully turning around a low-performing school?” The study explored the principals’ perspectives on the impact of NCLB sanctions on their individual schools. It provided significance by empowering federal, state, and local educational policy actors with information from practitioners on the reconstitution strategy, removal of principals, charter schools, and other NCLB required sanctions designed to assist low-performing schools and the students who attend these schools.

This review of literature focused on five specific constructs. These constructs are as follows: (a) the history of America’s schools, (b) the demographic shifts in urban public education, (c) Improving American School Act, (d) The No Child Left Behind Act, and (e) the role and perceived impact of the urban principal in school turnaround.

History of America’s Schools

Cremin (1988) noted that the American educational system was designed to provide American citizens access to self-determination. Crouse (2012) focused on this statement from the perspective of Horace Mann when she utilized his quote, “Education, then, beyond all other devices of human origin is the great equalizer of the conditions of man/” Cremin (1988) in his book *American Education: The Metropolitan Experience 1876-1980* went on to suggest, “From the time of its development during the 1830s and
1840s the American commitment to popular education embraced at least two complementary elements” (p. 154).

Cremin (1988) expressed the belief that the first goal maintained universal education was a responsibility of republican government, and long-term reforms in society are better achieved through education than politics. Spring (2007) suggested schools have been asked to meet many agendas, including historical, political, and economic ones. Spring went on to say, the original goals of schooling still guide the work of educators. Therefore, the multiplicity of things schools are now asked to do is a result of an accumulating historical agenda.

Many educators and historians have asked the simple question “What is the purpose of the American school?” Ravitch (2013) suggested that the purpose of schools is greater than democracy and meeting public agendas. Ravitch stated, in her view, public schools are rooted in their communities. They exist to serve the children of the communities. In addition to these ideas on the purpose of public education, Muhammad (2009) mentioned that for over a century educators, politicians, and citizens debated the purpose of public education. Education traditionally has been viewed as the best route for social mobility, but for some, this route is not accessible.

With a wide variety of proposed reasons for the design of the American educational system and the many views of its purpose, the researcher wanted to gain the perspective of an external practitioner on education. Why do we have schools? This was the question asked by sociologist, Anselm Eder, proposed that schools exist for decision making and democracy, and to assist citizens to learn what we need to earn a living. Eder also stated, “Our citizens have to go to school in order to be furnished with the
instruments needed to understand the arguments of our opponents if you are from the school of Paulo Freire, 1971” (Eder, 2008, p. 26).

Using a sociological lens, Eder (2008) stated, “Virtually each and every possible and useful human capability is handed over to teachers as another task to be included in the curriculum of formal education” (p. 26). Eder concluded his thoughts with an eye-opening statement. Eder went on to propose that the purpose of school is blurry at best and limited to vague ideas about teaching kids everything needed for success in life (Eder, 2008).

When looking at the purpose of education from an Afro-centric perspective, that viewpoint may be evident in what Shujaa (1994) wrote when suggesting that in America, people of African descent are caught in a tumultuous paradox. When it comes to education and acquisition of life-giving and sustaining knowledge, African American contributions are absent in the text. “Too many of our children are trapped in urban schools that have been ‘programmed’ for failure” (Shujaa, 1994, p. 1). This perspective is addressed in more detail later in the review of literature as I discuss the impact of NCLB sanctions on African American communities.

Although there are various opinions on the purpose of public education (Eder, 2008; Muhammad, 2009; Ravitch, 2013; Shujaa, 1994), as citizens of this country, education is a right. Not only is education a right of American citizens, it is mandatory. “It is a crime not to educate your children” (Orfield & Frankenberg, 2013, p. 8). All American citizens are afforded the right to a free public education. Laws such as the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 have impacted the current state of our educational system as well as the NCLB Act of 2001 (Darling-Hammond et
Unfortunately, many students of color find themselves in segregated schools (Orfield & Frankenberg, 2013).

**Demographic Shifts of American Schools**

Looking at the history of public education in America, it is imperative that the segregated school system designed prior to the civil rights areas be noted. Darling-Hammond (2007) has suggested that 50 years after *Brown v. Board of Education*, the United States has become accustomed to educational inequalities and the educational achievement gaps are still large. The educational inequalities are exacerbated when viewing the geographic locations of minority students. Darling-Hammond (2007) addressed this in her studies noting that African American and Hispanic students are concentrated in central city public schools. Many become majority “minority. “Today 69% of the largest 100 school districts are made up of predominately minority students,” according to Sable and Hoffman (as cited in Darling-Hammond, 2007).

The segregated school system addressed by Darling-Hammond (2007) is not new. According to Cremin (1988), “In 1946-47 seventeen states and the District of Columbia still required separate schools for blacks and whites by law; 12 states specifically forbade the segregation of students on the basis of race, and 14 states were silent on the matter” (p. 257). Furthermore, Cremin went on to state:

The eminent Black educator Charles H. Thompson detailed the inequalities in the educational opportunities and educational achievements of whites and blacks in the segregated systems. 11.7% of the blacks had not a single year of schooling in comparison to 2.8% of the whites and 11.6% of the whites and 37.0% of the blacks were functionally illiterate. (p. 258)
These statistics were accumulated under the pervasively segregated schools in America during the 1940s.

As the move for integrating schools became a federal law in 1954 with the Brown versus Board of Education decision, there was great opposition by Southern states (Cremin, 1988). In spite of the Brown decision and the impact in the South, schools in many northern states were not desegregated until the 1970s. Former President John F. Kennedy reiterated the concern with segregated schools. As a presidential candidate, he spoke in Harlem, New York, and brought attention to the unequal educational dilemmas faced by minority students. Kennedy stated,

If a Negro baby is born here and a white baby is born next door, that Negro baby’s chance of finishing high school is about 60% of the white baby’s, his chance of being unemployed is four times as high. (Cremin, 1988, p. 262)

The state of American public school system and segregation along with educational inequalities as they relate to academic achievement for Black children have been a concern for many years. The segregation of students continues. According to Long (2014), “What we’ve seen over the past two decades is a slow but steady increase in the isolation of Black and Latino students; there is double segregation of race and poverty” (p. 31). The principal as leader of the school is responsible for insuring the students are safe and they learn. In spite of the inequality concern with segregated schools, principals of these schools are required to meet adequate yearly progress (AYP) requirements with all subgroups (Myers, 2012).

The opposition to segregated schools by Charles Thompson and John F. Kennedy are only a few of the sentiments expressed by citizens concerned with the country’s
educational system during the 1940s through the 1960s. Today, educators still detail their concerns regarding the education of minority students in a segregated setting. On a lecture tour Darling-Hammond (2007) said “In 2000, 72% of the nation’s Black students attend predominately minority schools up significantly from 63% in 1980” (p. 320).

Darling-Hammond also stated:

Throughout two centuries of slavery, a century of court sanctioned discrimination based on race, and a half century of differentiated access to education by race, class, language background and geographical locations we have become accustomed in the United States to educational inequalities. (p. 318)

Shujaa (1994) suggested in his book, *Too Much Schooling Too Little Education: A Paradox of Black Life in White Society*, the educational plan for the African descendent was designed well before the current achievement gaps and segregated school systems became paramount in our society. Shujaa also noted that the Negro education system was carefully planned and implemented. Shujaa (1994) explained that the Lake Mohonk Convention in 1891 was the platform intended to influence the educational policy of the Negro. The convention purpose was to design a four-plank platform for states to follow. Two of the four planks (Shujaa, 1994) are listed below and they were designed for all generations to come:

1. The accomplishing of the primary education of the Negro by the states themselves, and the further development of means and methods to this end, till all Negroes are credibly trained in primary schools.

2. The largely increased support of schools aided by private benevolence, which shall supply teachers and preachers for the Negro race. (p. 47)
Shujaa (1994) went on to suggest that this plan was designed to keep a permanent underclass in America and create a segregated working and laboring class of people to provide low wage laborers for those educational elite. The increasing isolation of students of color (Cremins 1988; Darling-Hammond, 2007; Long, 2014; Orfield & Frankenberg 2013) has continued well beyond the Lake Mohonk Convention. The five largest public school districts in America are New York City, Los Angeles Unified, Puerto Rico Department of Education, Chicago City, and Dade County, Florida (Sable & Hoffman, 2005). Of the top five districts, which enroll over 21 million students out of the 71 million in the 100 largest districts, over 85% of the student population is non-white (Sable & Hoffman, 2005). American urban schools are becoming predominately schools of color (Darling-Hammond, 2007; Long, 2014; Sable & Hoffman, 2005). How these demographic changes will impact student subgroups under NCLB can have a tremendous impact on the communities they serve.

**Poverty Impact**

In the American educational system, poor and minority have become synonymous. Orfield (2001) stated, “For all groups except Whites, racially segregated schools are almost always schools with high concentrations of poverty,” (as cited in Darling-Hammond, 2007, p. 320). The poverty trend regarding high minority segregated schools presents a problem for our country if these schools are not producing students that are meeting the adequate yearly progress marker set by NCLB.

The principals in predominately minority buildings are not only dealing with lower achievement test scores, they are addressing the pervasive issues associated with poverty. In the book, *No Excuses: Lessons from 21 High Performing High Poverty*
Schools, Casey-Carter (2000) suggested, “Running a high poverty school is one of the most important leadership positions in America” (p. 3). According to Casey-Carter (2000) when interviewing a principal at the Frederick Douglass Academy in Harlem, he was told “A tenured teacher recently came into my office and told me, ‘These children can’t learn. It’s cultural.’ So, I looked at the lady and said, ‘You’ve got two choices. Either resign or I’m going to fire you’” (Casey-Carter, p. 1).

Not only must the principal address the defeatist attitudes of staff in poor schools, he must be a beacon of hope. The NCLB policy on adequate yearly progress (AYP) indicated that all subgroups must meet the proficiency benchmark. To count as a subgroup, there must be at least 30 or more students in a specific category. Ohio Big Eight Urban districts subgroups include economically disadvantaged, multi-racial, English learners, African American, White, individuals with disabilities, and Hispanic students in many of their schools. Many suburban districts are homogenous and have limited to no additional subgroups for AYP. For some principals, this affects the entire building (Ravitch, 2013).

In addition to the responsibilities of principals in the age of accountability and the history of the American educational system, society still places a great deal of personal responsibility for students on schools. Muhammad (2009) stated:

NCLB mandates the school as the responsible party when it comes to effectiveness. This is very different from the traditional belief that students and their families were primarily responsible for the effectiveness of education; educators were the experts, and schools provided students with the opportunity to learn. (p. 17)
Muhammad suggested that regardless of race, students from poor families are experiencing significant costs of a poor education. Whereas, the poorer one’s socioeconomic conditions, the higher the risk for mental disability and psychiatric concerns (Muhammad, 2009). Furthermore, Myers (2012) stated that when examining causes of failing schools the most prominent external factors include minority student population and low socioeconomic status. The internal factors that are the most prominent are poor teacher quality, ineffective leadership, and low resources.

Myers (2012) suggested these internal and external factors contribute to low morale, which impacts the climate. When placed together with low expectations, a low-performing or failing school results. As the demographics of public education continue to change and the minority students become majority students in large urban public education systems (Darling-Hammond, 2007; Long, 2014; Orfield & Frankenberg, 2013; Sable & Hoffman, 2005), the wealth gap for the minority population continues to decline in comparison to White families.

According to Crouse (2012), in July 2011, the Associated Press released statistics claiming that the recent economic problems in the United States have significantly increased the wealth gap between Caucasians, African Americans, and Hispanics. Data show that the median wealth of Caucasian families was $113,149 in 2009. At the same time, it was $6,325 for Hispanics and just $5,677 for Black families. Poverty continues to plague students of color in urban schools. The segregated schools (Cremin, 1988; Darling-Hammond, 2007; Maxwell, 2014; Muhammad, 2009) are but a few of the concerns along with poverty that impact the instructional atmosphere of urban principals. According to Sable and Hoffman (2005), “In 2003 over 46% of the students in the largest
100 school districts were eligible for free or reduced lunch” (p. 29). The poverty issue and segregated schools could become issues of concern for urban principals very soon as the student academic accountability concern rises. The accountability push for standardized testing and educational reform became a monumental task in 1994 with the Improving America’s School Act (Darling-Hammond et al., 2014).

**Improving America’s School Act**

The Improving America’s School Act of 1994 placed tremendous responsibilities on principals and local school districts. The law authorized about 11 billion dollars for K-12 education programs in fiscal 1995, according to *Education Week*. Under the Improving America’s School Act during the Clinton administration, the nation began the process of organizing school improvement around standards for learning and measuring those standards periodically with state assessments. These assessments included portfolios and performance tasks assessing higher-order thinking skills (Darling-Hammond et al., 2014).

According to Herman et al. (2008), The Improving America’s School Act introduced the concept of holding schools accountable for school performance. This legislation encouraged states to assess if schools were making academic progress. Students were to be tested between grades 3 and 5, again between grades 6 and 9, and again between grades 10 and 12 (*Education Week*, 1994). The Improving America’s School Act served as a catalyst which set the stage of measuring school success by student academic achievement.

Although the Improving America’s School Act (IMASA) started the trend for school accountability with respect to adequate yearly progress, it did not carry the stiff
sanctions or ramifications for schools that did not improve that found under NCLB.

Under the IMASA schools failing to make adequate yearly progress for two years would institute a series of actions which included: withholding Title I funds, designating 10% of Title I funds to professional development, reconstituting staffs, transferring students, or implementing state opportunities to learn strategies (Education Week, 2).

Under the Improving America’s School Act Title X---Programs of National Significance Part C, there is the first mention of Charter Schools. IMASA authorized 15 million dollars for aid to districts to establish charter schools (Education Week, 8).

IMASA authorized 11 billion dollars for school reform at the time of enactment in 1995. However, NCLB sanctions provided options for students to attend charter schools. This was not the case under IMASA. In 2001, if a school failed to make adequate yearly progress for two years, it could choose a charter school under public school choice. This initial $15 million authorization under IMASA has turned into a multibillion-dollar business for charter schools in Ohio. According to William Phillis of Ohio Equity and Adequacy in the online article by Patrick O’Donnell of the Cleveland Plain Dealer, (2015, September 23), Electronic Classroom of Tomorrow (ECOT) Ohio’s largest charter school received over $104 million tax payer dollars and carries an F rating by the Ohio Department of Education for school progress.

The financial ramifications associated with NCLB sanctions were not part of the espoused values of the mantra, “leave no child behind.” The public school choice sanction for underperforming schools has provided a means of making individuals and corporations wealthy using public taxpayer dollars. The financial ramifications of NCLB sanctions have placed a tremendous burden on Ohio Big Eight public school districts.
ECOT is but one example of the ramifications of the sanctions imposed by NCLB. IMASA did not provide the financial incentive to deregulate public education that NCLB sanctions have, and as a result of the financial gains of companies like ECOT, Bell’s (1980) convergence of interest theory makes a great deal of sense. When a financial incentive was added for the development of charter schools and a means to finance these schools using public taxpayer dollars, corporations and wealthy donors found an interest to converge. These political contributors supported the NCLB legislation. Bipartisan support at the federal level was garnered for passing the NCLB Act.

According to Herman et al. (2008):

The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 changed many of the initial IMASA policies by requiring a regimen of annual testing in grades 3 through 8 and imposing sanctions on schools that failed to make adequate yearly progress.

(p. 4)

The movement toward accountability for school academic performance and the increased responsibilities on the school leadership, in the form of the school principal, became a dilemma for urban school principals. The financial ramifications of public school choice became a tremendous responsibility for the school districts.

While the need for education and increased accountability are paramount in America, Muhammad (2009) stated:

Education has traditionally been viewed as the best route for social mobility but for some young people this route is not accessible. An abundance of data on the costs of this failure of our educational system show the system is absolutely broken. (p. 5)
With the NCLB law, the role of accountability on teaching staffs and districts changed dramatically. The leadership role of the principal in urban schools changed dramatically as well. The impact of this law would change the landscape of urban public education significantly. This review of literature examined the role NCLB has played in the school principal’s perception of public education, after successfully turning around under-performing schools in the era of accountability and sanctions.

**No Child Left Behind (NCLB): Elementary Secondary Education Act (ESEA)**

Myers (2012) suggested when the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act was passed in 2001, its stated goal was all students would be proficient in reading and math by 2013-14. Eder (2008) noted that in order to change organizations, first changes in polices and rules must be made. The NCLB act provided accountability and encouraged sanctions on public education institutes that failed to reach standards (Ravitch, 2013). The NCLB Act was landmark legislation focused on accountability for student academic achievement outcomes. All students as well as subgroups of 30 or more children were required to meet the proficient rating in states (Ravitch, 2013). Sanctions for failing to meet the targets for student academic achievement required districts and schools to use research-based practices for low-performing schools.

Myers (2012) suggested that NCLB is complex and has a variety of programs and standards for accountability. Myers listed the following features that explained the NCLB process and recommendations:

1. All states chose their own tests, adopt three performance levels, and define criteria for proficiency.
2. All public schools receiving federal funds are required to test all students in grades 3 through 8 annually and once in high school in reading and mathematics and disaggregate scores to ensure every group's progress would be monitored and not hidden in overall averages.

3. All states were required to establish timelines showing how 100% proficiency would be reached in reading and mathematics by 2013-14.

4. All schools and school districts were expected to make AYP for every subgroup toward the goal of 100% proficiency by 2013-14.

5. Any school not making AYP for every subgroup was labeled a school in need of improvement and faced a series of increasing sanctions:
   a. Year one school put on notice for failing to make AYP.
   b. In the second year of failing to make AYP the school was required to offer all its students the right to transfer to a successful school with transportation paid for from the districts allotment of federal funds.
   c. In the third year of failing to make AYP the school was required to offer free tutoring to low income students paid for from the districts federal funds.
   d. In the fourth year of failing to make AYP the school is required to take corrective action which may include curriculum changes, staff changes or longer student contact times.
   e. In the fifth year of failing to make AYP the school was required to restructure.

6. Schools required to restructure had five options:
   f. Convert to a charter school
g. Replace the principal and staff
h. Relinquish control to a private management team
i. Turn control over to the state
j. Any other major restructuring of the school’s governance

7. NCLB required all state to participate in the federal National Assessment of the Educational Progress (NAEP) test, which did not provide for consequences for schools but rather, served as an external audit to monitor the progress of the states in meeting their goals. (Myers, 2012, p. 2)

NCLB’s accountability and 100% proficient expectation for all subgroups by 2013-14 was an unattainable goal contributing to schools being labeled failing schools over the course of the implementation of the law (Myers, 2012). Other researchers have varying opinions on the NCLB Act. A strong statement of disagreement was demonstrated by Ravitch (2013) who stated:

After more than a decade of No Child Left Behind, we now know that a program of testing and accountability leaves millions of children behind and does not eliminate poverty or close the achievement gaps. The growing demand for more testing and more accountability in the wake of NCLB is akin to bringing a blowtorch to put out a fire. More of the same is not change. (p. 225)

Other educators such as (Muhammad, 2009; Myers, 2012 Ravitch, 2013) have expressed concerns with the NCLB act and have discussed means to address the concern from a larger organizational lens. Darling-Hammond et al. (2014) noted that although schools themselves are viewed as a key unit of change in education reform, the structuring of inequality occurs outside the school in the governmental units where
funding formulas, resource allocations, and other educational policies are forged. Darling-Hammond et al. (2014) suggested in addition to NCLB, if students are to be well-served, accountability must be reciprocal. “Federal, state, and local education agencies must themselves meet certain standards of delivery while school-based educators and students are expected to meet certain standards of practice and learning” (Darling-Hammond et al., 2014, p. 9).

**How Are Subgroups and AYP Determined?**

In urban schools with predominately minority populations there are often numerous subgroups. A subgroup under NCLB is identified as any group of 30 or more children of any particular race, gender, economic status, and or special education individual education plan (IEP), and English language learners (ELL) in a school building (2012-13, Technical Documentation, Ohio Department of Education, AMO Gap Closing Calculations). For a building to meet AYP and or Annual Measurement Objectives (AMO) in addition to meeting the state standard for student proficiency in math and reading, they must also meet the federal standard which was increased to 83.5% as of 2013 in Ohio. All students and each subgroup must obtain the state and federal proficient level for sanctions not to be applied (Ohio Department of Education 2012).

According to Darling-Hammond (2007), NCLB requires all schools receiving funding to test annually. There are penalties for schools and districts not meeting test score targets. These targets are for the whole school and each subgroup. Subgroups are defined and categorized by race, ethnicity, language, socio economic status, and disability. When school buildings fail to reach the targets for two consecutive years, school-wide or subgroup, NCLB sanctions begin (Myers, 2012). Sanctions for failing to
meet targets include closing of buildings, reconstitution of staffs, terminating the principal as well as turning over operations to a management company (Polikoff, McEachin, Wrable, & Duque, 2014).

**Urban Principals’ Impact**

Principals have influence and impact as leaders of the school building. When it comes to increasing student academic achievement and meeting the NCLB adequate yearly progress standards, how much impact do they provide? How much influence is needed to turn around under-performing schools? According to Edmonds (as cited in Bloom & Owens, 2011), “There may be schools out there that have strong instructional leadership but are not yet effective; however, we have yet to find an effective school that did not have a strong instructional leader as principal” (p. 15).

Principals also play a strong role in connecting parents, educators, and the community (Ishimaru, 2013). This role cannot be understated when looking at the role of schools in the community in which they are located. I bring this to the attention of the reader as a point of emphasis. There are significant implications to neighborhoods and communities when closing neighborhood schools. Yet, this is one of the sanctions for underperformance under the NCLB sanctions.

The literature on principals and school turnaround is extensive (Edmonds, 1979; Hawthorne-Clay, 2010; Ishimaru, 2013; Muhammad, 2009; Myers, 2012; Terosky, 2014), and often looks at the leadership styles of principals who have impacted the overall performance and turnaround process. One of the conceptual frameworks used to discuss the leadership styles is role theory. Role theory highlights expectations as part of the social context that can shape individuals’ identities and corresponding behaviors
(Ishimaru, 2013). Urban principals who turn low-performing schools around have multiple groups to address. School turnaround is a monumental task and requires working with many agencies in addition to the day-to-day responsibilities of operations in the school.

Choosing a leadership model to utilize at the district level can cause a tremendous imbalance at the building level when input or leadership styles are not fit or adaptive to the model chosen. Often districts define the practices or professional development they will use for school turnaround with limited input for the principal (Ishimaru, 2013). Role theory is but one of the conceptual frameworks. How does a principal in urban settings determine what framework to use for transformational change in academic achievement levels? Transformational leadership is the process that changes and transforms people by assessing the motives and raising levels of awareness of staffs (Alston & McClellan, 2011). Turning a school around requires transformational and instructional leadership (Edmonds, 1979).

Further studies were conducted to look at the impact of instructional leadership models used by principals. Terosky (2014) conducted a study on the instructional leadership model as an approach to turning around under-performing schools. In the study Terosky (2014) said “The general consensus among scholars is that principals have an indirect but significant effect on student achievement” (p. 6). Often researchers look at reform models as opposed to the direct impact the instructional leader makes in the building. The NCLB sanctions addressed the principal as the instructional leader which is why one of the sanctions for failing to meet the AYP goals was to remove the principal. Muhammad (2009) stated, “Identifying educators as the sole cause of low student
performance (or high student performance for that matter) is not only inaccurate, but it makes the job of developing positive school culture even more difficult” (p. 19).

The accountability movement increased pressure on urban school principals. Many were challenged by the number of subgroups in each building and the ability to get all students to proficient ratings. Yet, the task to meet the NCLB standards is not just impacting urban schools. According to Bloom and Owens (2011), “few states and the nation in general have experienced the expected performance gains or reductions in achievement gaps from billions of dollars invested in the school reform movement” (p. 215). With obstacles and the daunting task of transforming a low-performing school to an effective school, the researcher viewed the perspective of urban principals who have accomplished this task as a viable resource for future policy implications. “The people who touch the work know the work” (Savage, personal communication, July, 2012). This statement set precedence for the researcher in understanding the principal’s role regarding the implications of NCLB on urban schools.

Our schools are changing and the education of the nation is imperative to keeping our country in a position of maintaining our position in global economics and innovation. Yet, as the ability to close the achievement gaps increases, so does the percentage of students who are impoverished and fall into minority status. Edmonds (1979) suggested that the talent, resources, and ability exist to educate all students, including the poor; what must be remembered is the important fact that educating all has not occurred If increased minority status increases the poverty rates as stated by Orfield (2001), how does the changing demographics of this country’s school system impact the principal’s ability to make AYP and a safe harbor and keep from dealing with the sanctions of
NCLB? According to Maxwell (2014), for the first time, the overall number of Latino, African-American, and Asian students in public K-12 classrooms is expected to surpass the number of non-Hispanic whites. The new collective majority of minority school children is projected to be 50.3% according to the National Center for Education Statistics (2015).

**Urban Principals in Ohio**

The title Urban Public School Principal carries a tremendous amount of responsibility. In the State of Ohio, there are eight districts which make up the Ohio Big Eight Urban District schools. These districts include Akron, Canton, Cleveland, Cincinnati, Columbus, Dayton, Toledo, and Youngstown (Ohio Department of Education, 2008). The day-to-day responsibilities of principals in the Big Eight and other urban districts vary. Yet, the responsibilities as an instructional leader in an urban school remain similar (Terosky, 2014).

These responsibilities start immediately before the students arrive and range from staff absenteeism to early morning meetings. Examples of the day-to-day responsibilities are addressed by Terosky (2014) who studied urban principals in New York. Terosky quoted principals regarding their day-to-day responsibilities in the urban school. Terosky listed the following examples of concerns expressed by principals in her study:

Principals stated, “with a week’s notice we had to give H1N1 vaccinations to the entire elementary school with one nurse.” Another principal stated, “I was out of the office for training for a few days; when I returned, I had over 800 emails.” A third principal responded, “if you add up all the lost instructional time spent on
preparing for and administering tests, it would make anyone interested in true learning sick!” (p. 15)

Terosky (2014) went on to state when people were asked, “What is the number one thing you would change about your role to improve instructional leadership?” Ten participants replied reduce accountability-related paperwork, surveys, e-mails, and training sessions” (p. 14).

**Principals and the State**

According to Peterson (2013), the roles and responsibilities from the day-to-day stressful activities have increased the pressure on the school leader to meet the NCLB standards. It does not go without notice that the leaders of urban schools have a tremendous responsibility. In addition to the sanctions and standards that NCLB set for principals, they are employees of the state. Fowler (2013) stated, “School administrators act as hierarchal leaders within their organizations and as public leaders in the broader community” (p. 18). Fowler (2013) suggested a question becomes why are educators not the implementers or the developers of the educational policies that regulate their employment, and how do the principals become policy actors on the state and federal levels? Fowler (2013) stated, “Legally school districts are agencies of the government of the state within which they are located” (p. 19). As agency representatives of the state, principals become federal and state policy implementers.

**Demographics of the Big Eight in Ohio**

According to the Ohio Department of Education, one third of all economically disadvantaged public school students reside in the Big Eight districts (KidsOhio.org Report, 2009, p. 8). In addition to this one half of all minority children in Ohio public
schools attend schools in the Big Eight districts (KidsOhio.org Report, 2009, p. 8). Yet, in spite of NCLB and the sanctions for failing to meet adequate yearly progress benchmarks, a small number of principals in urban settings were able to increase student academic achievement and turn low-performing schools into high-performing schools.

In Ohio, Youngstown City Schools is the latest district to be impacted by NCLB sanctions. Youngstown is one of the Ohio Big Eight Urban School Districts. Cleveland Public Schools was the first to be impacted by state control. Phillis (2015) stated, “In a timeframe of 24 hours the legislature adopted the Youngstown Plan that bypasses the elected school board and will permit the appointment of an education czar to operate the failing school system.” Youngstown will be the second Big Eight Urban district to face state takeover. Cleveland Ohio was the first under The Cleveland Plan. The principals in this research work in buildings in which the students are predominately poor and in many cases predominately minority. See Table 1 for demographics of the Ohio Big Eight Urban Districts.
Table 1

*Ohio Big Eight Urban Districts Demographics*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School District</th>
<th>Student Population</th>
<th>Student Poverty</th>
<th>Median Income</th>
<th>Minority Population</th>
<th>State Rank</th>
<th>Performance Index</th>
<th>Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Akron</td>
<td>22,603</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>$24,324</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>687</td>
<td>84.54</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canton</td>
<td>9750</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>$20,910</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>696</td>
<td>84.03</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cincinnati</td>
<td>32,009</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>$27,819</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>654</td>
<td>87.28</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cleveland</td>
<td>43,202</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>$22,343</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>784</td>
<td>75.74</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Columbus</td>
<td>49,616</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>$26,759</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>725</td>
<td>81.75</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dayton</td>
<td>14,174</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>$22,493</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>781</td>
<td>75.87</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toledo</td>
<td>22,277</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>$24,558</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>708</td>
<td>83.06</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youngstown</td>
<td>6008</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>$19,844</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>807</td>
<td>73.72</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ww.ode.state.oh.us/localreportcards/accountability/2013

**No Child Left Behind Sanctions**

According to Ziebarth (2005), “NCLB requires that if a school fails to meet its state’s adequate yearly progress (AYP) performance benchmarks for five consecutive years, its district must create and, in the following year, implement a plan to restructure the school” (p. 1). Thus, a school that fails to improve for five consecutive years ceases to exist in its original form according to NCLB (Mintrop & Trujillo, 2005). Districts encounter a similar staged approach. When they fail to make district AYP for two consecutive years, they enter the improvement stage that primarily entails programmatic changes. After another two years of missing AYP, they are subject to corrective action that may severely curtail their authority (Mintrop & Trujillo, 2005). There are five ways to meet the corrective action requirement:
• Reopen the school as a charter school.
• Replace all or most of the staff, which may include the principal.
• Enter into a contract with a management company.
• Turn the operation over to the state education agency.
• Any other major restructuring of a school’s governance arrangement.

According to Ziebarth (2005), research shows that “the reconstitutions and state takeovers have had a mixed record of effectiveness in significantly improving chronically low-performing schools” (p. 2). The need to explore urban turnaround principal’s perspectives is imperative. The review of literature addressed current state and federal sanctions from practitioners who have successfully demonstrated school turnarounds.

**Defining Turnaround Schools**

According to Herman et al. (2008), “In 2006-2007, 70% of 98,905 schools nationwide (64,546) made adequate yearly progress; 10,676 schools were designated as schools in need of improvement, and 2,302 schools were designated as schools in need of improvement restructuring” (p. 5). *Turning Around Chronically Low-Performing Schools*, a study conducted for the U.S. Department of Education by Herman et al. (2008), defined “turnaround schools” as schools with chronically poor performers with a high proportion of their students (generally 20% or more) failing to meet state standards for proficiency in math and reading as defined under NCLB over two or more consecutive years. The schools defined as turnaround buildings, according to Herman et al. (2008), were schools that increased student achievement in no more than three years making substantial gains of at least 10 percentage points in the proportion of students
failing to meet state proficiency standards or lowering the dropout rates by 10 percentage points or more.

The percentage of increase for turnaround schools is significant if considering The 2014 Kids Count Data Book findings from the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics found from 1992 until 2013, and National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) tests. According to this report, “the percentage of fourth graders scoring below proficient in reading in 1992 was 73% as opposed to 66% in 2013. This amounts to a 7% increase in reading proficiency for fourth graders over 21 years” (The Ann E. Casey Foundation, 2014, p. 28). With this in mind, the principals in this research study represented elementary administrators with buildings formally in school improvement status for failing to make AYP. The process can be a daunting task in the error of accountability (Adelman & Taylor, 2011).

**Summary**

In summary key words were used in the review of literature search process. The key words included history of American schools, urban principals, No Child Left Behind, demographics of urban schools, and transformational and instructional leadership. These key words and descriptors were placed in search queries using educational resources information center (Eric), ProQuest, and Ohio link as well as dissertation searches using Google Scholar.

Once the information was selected, reviewed, and analyzed, the researcher used the information to look at five constructs that would address the research question: “What is the perception of urban school principals on NCLB after successfully turning around a low-performing school?” The constructs included the history of America’s schools, the
demographics of American urban schools, the impact of NCLB on schools and their communities, and the perceived impact of the principals in school turnaround.

While reviewing the theorists’ research articles and books, the researcher found new ideas relevant to the research study while summarizing the articles and different authors’ perspectives. These ideas included reviewing literature on the 100 largest urban school districts’ demographics and looking into the financial impact of NCLB sanctions on taxpayer dollars. This led to gaining a new lens to view NCLB’s impact on these communities. Many of the largest urban district students are students of color (Darling-Hammond 2007; Long, 2014; Sable & Hoffman, 2005). With the demographic changes and the focus on urban education, I began to look at the role of principals. The principal’s impact on school turnaround was viewed through the transformational, role theory, and instructional leadership models (Alston & McClellan, 2011; Ishimaru, 2013; Terosky, 2014).

Finally, the review of literature led the researcher to see that the purpose of education can be blurry and often vaguely defined (Eder, 2008). There is much more literature to review in order to determine NCLB accountability sanctions impact on urban school systems and the students and communities they serve. Gaining the perspective the urban principal practitioners using qualitative research methods can assist with understanding sanctions after successful school turnaround.
CHAPTER III

Methodology

According to Merriam (1998), a case study is the examination of a specific phenomenon, which can include a person, group, or institution. As a result of my own personal experiences, I wanted to investigate the specific personal experience of two urban school principals who have been impacted by NCLB sanctions, and in spite of these sanctions, were able to transform low-performing schools into high-performing schools. This specific phenomenon was the focus of my study. In Chapter I, I addressed the statement of the problem, purpose of study, research question, conceptual framework, and significance of the study. Chapter II contained a review of literature on the history of education, the NCLB Act, as well as an introduction to the conceptual frameworks. Chapter III has described the methodology for the study exploring urban school principals’ perceptions of NCLB sanctions after successfully turning around a low-performing school. This chapter also included the reason for the study, the participants, sampling methods used, data collections, procedures, and data analysis methods. The issue of trustworthiness and the four criteria used to assist in creating trustworthiness which include transferability, dependability, credibility, and conformability also are addressed. Limitations of the scope and size of the study conclude this chapter.

Setting

The participants used for this study both work in Midwestern American cities in schools that are located in the Ohio Big Eight Urban Districts. Participant Number One referred to as Mona is a White female, middle-aged principal who currently serves as a central office administrator. The school used for this research study is her former school,
an elementary school serving grades K-5. In the 2009-2011 school years, the building was in School Improvement Year (4) and rated in Academic Watch. At the time of her school turnaround, she was serving in her first year as principal. The school served 387 students with a 38% minority student population and a 100% free and reduced lunch rate.

Research participant number two is an African American male principal. He is a middle-aged veteran educator serving as principal of an elementary school. His school is in a Midwestern city with a population of approximately 72,000 residents. His school is in one of the Ohio Big Eight Urban Districts. His student population includes 281 K-5 students with a 55.5% minority student population. The free and reduced lunch rate at the school is 88%. Participant number two is referred to as Henry. His school building was in School Improvement status year 1 and was rated in Academic Watch at the start of his tenure in the building. The school served a 23% special education population.

The qualitative research methodology was used to investigate the perceptions of these two urban school principals on the impact of NCLB sanctions on their schools and community after successfully turning around a low-performing school. Merriam (1998) suggested that qualitative research focuses on discovery, insight, and understanding. Merriam went on to say that qualitative research offers some of the strongest promise for making significant contributions to education. My goal for the study of NCLB sanctions from the perspective of urban school principals was to contribute to the knowledge and increase understanding on the impact of these sanctions on urban school communities.

In addition, qualitative research provides the opportunity to gain in-depth knowledge from the perspective of practitioners that have been impacted by the sanctions. The case study method affords the potential for deeper richer understanding on
the individual schools and their community. The personal experiences of these two principals impacted by NCLB sanctions, along with my own experiences, led me to study this specific phenomenon using the case study method. I used the descriptive data to develop conceptual categories to illustrate, support, or challenge the theoretical assumptions held prior to the data gathering. According to Willis (2007), this type of data gathering and collection would indicate an interpretive variation of the case study research method.

**Participants**

In order to find research participants for this study, I reviewed the Ohio Department of Education Local Report Card Data from 2006-2013. I specifically looked for data on individual schools in Big Eight Urban districts that demonstrated significant increases in the Performance Index. Once I found schools that demonstrated the significant growth to meet turnaround criteria, I focused on schools in two Ohio Big Eight Urban districts. I looked for schools that moved from either Academic Emergency to Continuous Improvement in three years or less or for schools that moved from Academic Watch to Effective in three years or less. For the purpose of proximity, I focused on Big Eight school districts within a 25-mile radius of my home. After I found schools meeting the criteria listed, I looked for the names of the principals on the ODE report card. Two principals meeting the criteria for this research were principals of whom I was aware. I either had seen their work over the years in the two districts or heard of their leadership. As a result, I reached out to each of them and asked if they would be willing to participate in my research. The sample population included one African American male and one White female. The sample was unique purposive sampling, based
on proximity as well as a prior knowledge of these principals’ successes at turning around low-performing schools in Big Eight Urban districts. Merriam (1998) stated, “Purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most must be learned” (p. 61). Purposeful sampling includes typical, unique, maximum variation, convenience, snowball, chain, and network sampling.

Phase two of the research process included purposive sampling using the snowball method. As a member of the TALK Network, a community of 17 Cuyahoga County inner-ring suburban districts, I used this network to assist with distributing my questionnaire. The intention was to secure approximately 50-100 educator responses from urban educators and Inner-Ring Districts of Cleveland, to gain their perspective on the effect of NCLB sanctions on their schools and community. Cleveland, Ohio was chosen for the questionnaires, due to my current role as a school administrator in the Cleveland area. The questionnaire responses were not the focus of this qualitative case study. The questionnaire responses were reviewed and used to look for emerging themes. Themes that align or vary from the individual principal experiences were incorporated into the findings. The individual case studies and the principals’ experiences were the focus of this research.

My intent for the questionnaire was to gain responses using the snowball sampling method. According to Merriam (1998), snowball sampling is one of the most common forms of purposeful sampling. Merriam stated, “This strategy involves asking each participant or group of participants to refer you to other participants” (p. 63). I planned to use the Inner-Ring TALK Network in Cleveland as the nucleus for
participants and requested they share the questionnaire link with their colleagues. I requested educators to complete my questionnaire using a survey monkey link with questions specific to NCLB sanctions (see Appendix B).

I planned to gather my data using archived report card data, field notes, documents, interviews, questionnaires, and phone discussions with my two participants along with reviewing the responses from the questionnaire. The questionnaire was not central to this research. The individual case studies were the focus of this research. The questionnaire responses were used to triangulate data gathered from the interviews looking for similarities and differences.

My plan was to interview each principal three times. Each interview was from one to two hours. Each principal had met the criteria for successful transformation as evidenced by their Ohio Department of Education Report Card data demonstrating successful turnaround of a low-performing school. Both principals moved buildings from Academic Watch (D) rating to an Effective (B) rating.

As stated earlier, the sample population included one African American male and one White female. The sample was purposive and based on proximity as well as a prior knowledge of these principals’ successes at turning around low-performing schools in Big Eight Urban districts. The principals utilized for this research study were purposefully sampled based on review of the Ohio Department of Education Local Report Cards data from 2006-2013 in two Ohio Big Eight Urban Districts. Each principal’s school report card demonstrated specific turnaround criteria of moving a school from the D rating to a B in three years or less. One building was in School Improvement status year 4, which meant reconstitution and or removal of staff, while the
other was in School Improvement At-Risk status. Merriam (1998) listed types of purposeful sampling. The unique purposeful sampling method was used, in this case, based on unique, atypical attributes or occurrences of the phenomenon.

I used the purposeful sampling technique because my principals were rare and atypical with the unique experience of turning around a low-performing urban school in the era of NCLB sanctions. Their perspectives were different from a principal affected by the NCLB sanctions and unable to turn around the school. One of the sanctions imposed under NCLB is the removal of the principal along with reconstitution of the staff. Each principal had his or her own interpretation of the sanctions’ impact on their students, staff, and community. Utilizing unique purposeful sampling method for this research provided me the opportunity to focus on the essence of each principal’s unique experiences after sanctions were imposed and the impact on that principal’s students, staff, and community.

In addition, an interpretive approach case study methodology for this research provided several benefits. Merriam (1998) stated, “Qualitative research uses the researcher as the primary instrument for data collection and analysis” (p. 7). My interest in this topic was intrinsically bound. Intrinsic interest is a key to case studies according to Merriam. Using semi-structured interviews for this case study allowed me to adapt to the participant’s answers and be sensitive to the circumstances as well as pick up nonverbal cues and other aspects used in my coding and notes. My urgency and focus was on the quality of the process, not the quantity of perspectives (Merriam, 1998). Qualitative research provided comprehensive rich deep descriptive information from the perspective of the individual participants.
Data Collection

According to Seidman 2006 (as cited in Crouse, 2012), “a three-interview process improves the relationship between the interviewer and the participant making it more likely to gather richer information” (Crouse, 2012, p. 66). Seidman (2006, as cited in Crouse, 2012), declared the first interview was to gain understanding of the context of the experience. My second interview was to ask deeper questions for clarification based on responses from interview number one. My third interview was focused on the participants’ views of the experience, which was a suggested practice according to Seidman (2006) (as cited in Crouse, 2012). In addition to the three interviews with principals, interview logs, transcripts, and archival data from state report cards were collected.

Each interview was audiotaped and transcribed. In addition, the transcribed information was sent to the participants to review to assure accuracy. At the end of each interview, I took time to reflect and document my own perceptions of the interview and designed follow-up questions for the next session in my notes for reflexivity. Once all three interviews were completed, a final transcribed document was shared for review with the individual participants.

In addition, a questionnaire was used to gain the perceptions of educators in Ohio school districts using a snowball sampling method. According to Merriam (1998), purposive sampling assumes the researcher is attempting to understand and gain insight from a sample where the most can be learned. Merriam (1998) further stated that using a purposive sampling method requires determining specific criteria for selection of participants. The criteria should be specific to the purpose of the study. The purpose of
this study was to gain the perceptions of urban school principals on the impact of NCLB sanctions on the community and staff after successfully turning around a low-performing school. Thus, the unique purposeful sampled population was urban principals for the semi-structured interviews, and educators and community for the snowball sampling questionnaire.

Snowball sampling is a common form of purposeful sampling. The strategy involves asking each participant or group to refer the research questions or questionnaire to other information-rich individuals in their circle (Merriam, 1998). The questionnaire provided rich in-depth information to support, refute, or validate the perceptions of the research participants on the impact of NCLB sanctions from other educators. The questionnaire aligned with the first interview question used with each school principal. It offered a means to compare responses. The questionnaire provided questions to determine participant’s number of years in education. The responses supplied demographic information from participants listing urban, suburban, or rural school district and list gender, ethnicity, and or educational background. It was used to gain perspective on NCLB sanctions from multiple educator participants as part of my data collection, most importantly to triangulate my data to look for patterns in my coding and in the responses of my research participants. It was not the central focus of the case study but was used to triangulate data. Forty-one individuals responded to the questionnaire (see Appendix E).

Qualitative research methodology was chosen for this research as it provided the ability to interview, survey, and gain the perspective from practitioners using personal narratives. According to Flick (2007), qualitative research incorporates the ability to
understand, describe, and help to explain social phenomena from the inside. In addition, Flick (2007) suggested qualitative researcher’s personal experiences in the field in which they studied is an asset and assists in terms of reflexivity. My personal experience as a principal with urban education was noted in this project; I used an objective outsider to review my notes, coding process, and assistance with member checking for unbiased transcribing and coding. Each participant was provided the opportunity to review the transcribed narratives prior to my analysis and after each interview session had been transcribed.

Case study qualitative research, according to Merriam (1998), is used to gain in-depth understanding of a situation and influence policy, practice, and future research (p. 19). Merriam suggested that the single most important aspect of a qualitative case study is the defining characteristics. This means the intentional focus is on a specific phenomenon. My specific phenomenon was the effect of NCLB sanction on urban school principals who successfully turned around low-performing schools in spite of NCLB sanctions. I sought to provide perspective and interpret experiences of practitioners who have experienced the phenomenon of sanctions in urban settings and the impact on their schools and communities

**Procedures**

The first step was to identify the research participants. This required reviewing ODE local report card data from Ohio Big Eight Urban school districts from 2006-2014 report cards. These data were available on the Ohio Department of Education website. Once I decided to reduce my sample review from all Big Eight Urban district to two based on proximity to conduct interviews with participants, it allowed me to focus on a
much more workable population. I identified two Big Eight school districts within a 25-mile radius of my location.

I chose the two districts because they were both part of the Ohio Big Eight and close enough to allow me to meet with the research participants and conduct interviews in an effective fashion. In addition to proximity, I was familiar with the districts and it provided me the ability to research the schools, neighborhoods, and communities more closely. My location in Cuyahoga County limited my access to principals in other Big Eight districts because of time and distance. Once I was able to identify two principals meeting my criteria, I contacted them to see if they were willing to participate in the research. Each principal had data to demonstrate successful school turnaround by moving each of their schools to an Effective rating.

My next step was to design the interview questions. I used the specific terminology of NCLB sanctions for failing to make AYP. These questions ranged from opinions on school choice option, educational voucher options, removing principals, re-constitution of staffs, closing and re-opening the school as a charter school, and charter school options in general. I also added questions related to designating local school dollars to support experimental charter schools.

After I identified the principals for the research and developed the questions, I contacted them and scheduled times to talk. I wanted to talk with them using at least three interviews. The first interview would last at least two hours with each participant. The goal for the first interview was to provide each principal time to explain their experiences and establish a relationship that allowed for open dialog prior to starting the interviews. The second interview would be to ask more in-depth questions about the effect on the
school’s children, staff, and communities from a financial and personal perspective with regard to the pressure they perceived to serve or to save the students. I would provide each participant access to the questions to provide written responses prior to scheduling interviews. I needed to gain permission from the Human Subjects Review Board through an application process. This only occurred after I completed and defended the first three chapters of my proposal.

For phase one of the research project, the plan was to conduct interviews with the urban school principals addressing the research question, “How have NCLB sanctions impacted your school and community after you were able to successfully turn around a low-performing school?” The interviews would be conducted with principals who possessed data to support Turn-Around School status. According to Kutash, Nico, Malenfant, Rahmatullah, and Tallant (2010) in The School Turnaround Field Guide:

While questions remain about the term “turnaround,” the definition that Mass Insight Education put forward provides a good beginning. Turnaround is a dramatic and comprehensive intervention in a low-performing school that: a) produces significant gains in achievement within two years; and b) readies the school for the longer process of transformation into a high-performance organization. (p. 4)

For the purpose of this research, the principals selected for this research had Ohio Department of Education Report Card data to demonstrate they successfully turned around a low-performing school in two or three years by moving their building academic rating from Academic Watch (D) to an Effective (B) rating.
The sample population included one African American male and one White female. The sample was unique purposive sampling and based on proximity as well as a prior knowledge of these principals’ successes at turning around low-performing schools in Big Eight Urban districts. Phase two of the research process included purposive sampling using the snowball method. I sent questionnaires to principals, administrators, and educators in Ohio Big Eight districts to gain input on the impact of NCLB sanctions on their schools and community. I gathered my data using field notes, documents, interviews, questionnaires, and phone discussions with participants.

In order to gain the survey data, the following procedures were used. Seven questions were designed to gauge participants’ perspectives on sanctions associated with the NCLB Act. A Likert scale score using the 5-point system was utilized. One (1) indicating strong disagreement, 2 disagree, 3 neutral, 4 agree, and 5 strongly agree were the measures used to gauge participants’ perspectives on NCLB sanctions. A comment section was added to each question for participate feedback and deeper explanation of the responses.

Five questions were added to the original questionnaire to provide demographic data for each research participant. These questions allowed participants to list current position, years of education experience, race, gender, and type of district each participant represents. There was a total of 12 questions. Merriam (1998) suggested researchers utilize four types of questions, which include “Hypothetical, Devil’s Advocate, Ideal Position, and Interpretive Questions” (p. 77). The survey questions used for the case study and a variety of the Merriam (1998) proposed question types are included.
Data Analysis

According to Merriam (1998), there is a right and a wrong way to analyze the data collected. Merriam suggested the right way to analyze data is to conduct the analysis simultaneously with the data collection. As a result, I collected the data from the interviews and questionnaires to review patterns and themes that arose during the research. My intent was to use a descriptive analysis of the themes and patterns that emerged in this research looking at what had been discovered as a result of the study as opposed to defining a theory. My thoughts on the savior versus servant process in education was explored, yet it was not the focus of the study. If a pattern emerged based on this hypothesis, it could lead to future study. I reviewed my field notes and insured my field notes contained observer notes written during interviews and used on narratives or patterns found from the participants’ written responses to the questions provided. I planned to interview the participants multiple times using phone interviews, e-mailing questions prior to investigation, and in-person, semistructured, one-on-one interviews at a minimum of three occurrences of two hours or more until I exhausted all possible questions to assist with the themes, patterns, and findings from the research question.

A key component to analyzing these data was to keep track of my own personal biases and their influences on my analysis. As a result, I maintained field notes and reflected during this process and reviewed them periodically to keep my focus on objectivity. In addition, I looked for themes that emerged from comparing each research participant’s interviews to see if there were common, recurring concepts that emerged. I started by submitting the same written questions to each participant. I began the process of looking for ideas that emerged from the written responses and continued to the
individual interviews working on questions for more in-depth understanding based on the concepts that emerged from the initial written responses.

Once I was able to identify specific concepts that emerged from the written responses and interviews, I placed them in categories. I planned to align these categories and specific concepts with my theoretical framework and conceptual framework. In order to make sense of the data collected, I needed to insure alignment with the theoretical framework. Since I was using two schools and two principals, it was necessary to use a within-case analysis and a cross-case analysis, according to Merriam (1998). This involved looking at each case individually and then emerging themes and concepts prevalent in both cases.

Trustworthiness

According to Shenton (2004), trustworthiness of qualitative research can be questioned because validity and reliability cannot be easily addressed. Therefore, several steps needed to be taken and incorporated to address the issues of validity and reliability in qualitative studies. Shenton (2004) suggested in the pursuit of trustworthiness there are four specific criteria that must be addressed which include credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability. I attended to each of these criteria and my methods to insure the trustworthiness of my qualitative research process.

Credibility

Shenton (2004) suggested that credibility is demonstrated when a true picture of the phenomenon is being presented. As a means to convey the true picture of the phenomenon of NCLB sanctions’ impact on their communities from the perceptions of urban school principals who successfully turned around low-performing schools, I used
purposive sampling, and triangulated the data gaining the perspective of other practitioners’ perceptions on NCLB sanctions’ impact on students, staffs, and communities. In addition, a rich descriptive narrative of the schools, the principals, and in-depth interviews were addressed in the findings. I used questionnaires to principals in my current district and used a snowball sampling method to gain information from multiple practitioners as I traveled and made presentations to gain perspectives on NCLB sanctions. The participants using the questionnaire from the snowball sampled population had the exact same questions I used with the principals for this research project. Finally, I used peer scrutiny of the project for feedback on the process over the length of the research study. This included sending drafts of the dissertation to professors at Ashland University and the Cleveland Heights University Heights School District for review.

**Transferability**

Transferability is one of the four criteria used to assist with trustworthiness of qualitative research. Shenton (2004) stated, “To allow transferability provide sufficient detail of the context of the field work for a reader to be able to decide whether the findings can be justifiably applied to other settings” (p. 63). While I acknowledged that my sample participants for this case study were two principals from urban districts of different gender and race, I also was purposeful in the selection of the participants. My goal was to gain the perspective of an African American versus the perspective of a White American. I wanted to gain the perspective of a male and a female on the impact of sanctions on their communities. Each of these participants was different in gender, race, and each came from a different urban district. Both principals’ school turnarounds occurred at the elementary school level.
A key to transferability is a sufficient thick description of the phenomenon which allows the reader to have a proper understanding and compare instances which have emerged in similar situations (Shenton, 2004). The questionnaire allowed for numerous educators to provide their impressions on NCLB sanctions. I collected these questionnaires over a specific period, used multiple interview sessions, and provided the participant principals opportunities to give me written correspondence on my questions prior to our interviews.

**Dependability**

Dependability is similar to the issue of reliability and asks if the work be repeated using the same methods (and when completed using the same methods will the same findings or results be apparent). This was difficult using a qualitative case study. As a result, I chose not one case study, but the case study of two schools and two principals in Ohio Big Eight Urban Districts. My process was the same for each principal in terms of interview questions, time spent with each, and member checking with each to review my transcripts and interpretations of their answers concerning the impact of NCLB sanctions on their community after successfully turning around a low-performing school.

My data collection section, settings, and procedures listed in the methodology section are specific to the measures I used and provide future researchers with a means to duplicate replicate this study. One method of overlapping attempted was to see if the findings from the principals aligned with the findings from the multiple perspectives of the sample using questionnaires. The interview questions are included in Appendix B and can be used for research in the future along with the questionnaire.
Confirmability

In order to limit my own personal biases and potential for addressing my preferences as opposed to the findings from the questionnaires and the interviews, I used a variety of techniques. Many techniques are discussed in the data collection, dependability, and credibility sections. I gathered my data using field notes, documents, interviews, questionnaires, and phone discussions with principals.

The principal interviews were transcribed. I then summarized the findings as well as looked for patterns to code according to the questions’ emerging themes or categories. I had each participant review the transcribed semistructured interviews using the technique of member checking throughout the study. According to Merriam (1998), a number of writers suggest using member checking techniques throughout the study. This provided the participants the option to see if the information was plausible or to correct or modify any errors in my transcriptions. I formed tables based on the ODE report card data to demonstrate the Performance Index growth of each building for validity and inserted these tables and data into the research.

Finally, I used the responses to the snowball sampled questionnaires sent out to urban principals and their contacts to see if patterns existed for urban principals’ perspective on NCLB sanctions in comparison to the principals used for the research responses. I looked for patterns in urban principals’ responses to the impact of NCLB on urban schools labeled as underperforming from each principal’s perspective. In order to provide internal validity, I clarified my assumptions, world views, and theoretical orientation at the outset of the study to address any researcher biases. Merriam (1998) suggested using multiple strategies to enhance internal validity and provide triangulation
and look into research and more literature on this topic to see if results are similar or different.

**Limitations of the Study**

This research reflected the perceptions of these two principals on the impact of NCLB sanctions after successfully turning around a low-performing school. It also provided quantitative questionnaire data from teachers, administrators, and practitioners’ perspectives on NCLB sanctions and the impact on the staffs, communities, and students in urban schools in their areas. The size of the sample of this case study, two cases, limited the amount of transferability that may arise from the study. In addition, the research lens and or potential for subjectivity was possible when interpreting findings. As a result, member checking and peer review of the project were incorporated. I researched the impact on NCLB sanctions from a sample population in Ohio, which limited the ability for this information to be transferred out-of-state without a degree of certainty and the amount of time that was used for the research, all impact potential limitations to the study. Sample size, researcher objectivity, time for the research, location of participants, and interviewing skills and techniques were the areas that provided limitations to this study in my opinion. The attempts to address credibility, dependability, conformability and most importantly, trustworthiness were made at each stage of this research study.

**Summary**

In summary, the methodology section includes the research question I explored. In addition, the methodology section contains the settings for the research, the participants selected as well as the sampling methods chosen for this case study. The methodology section provided information on the data collection methods and procedures
used for this study. The research methods used for data analysis and reflection by the researcher were explained in Chapter III. This methodology section also incorporated the methods employed to insure trustworthiness of this research using the four criteria for trustworthiness including transferability, credibility, dependability, and conformability.
CHAPTER IV

Findings

The purpose of this qualitative research case study was to explore the question, “How have NCLB sanctions affected schools, communities, and staffs in urban districts from the perspective of the principal?” The emphasis of this study focused on the perceptions of urban principals who successfully turned around low-performing buildings as defined by Herman et al. (2008) and the Ohio Department of Education Performance Index rating system. Each principal’s school was in School Improvement status for failing to make AYP. Each school’s initial Performance Index rating placed it in Academic Watch (D). Each principal was able to raise the performance index rating to Effective (B) in three or less years. Thus, each research participant increased the performance of his or her school by 10 or more points in three or less years as required to meet the selection criteria.

Although there are studies that address urban principals and the perceived impact of change in principal leadership (Ishimaru, 2013; Myers, 2012; Terosky, 2014) and the abundance of research on NCLB and the accountability movement (Darling-Hammond et al., 2014; Muhammad, 2009; Ravitch, 2013), there is limited research on the perspective of NCLB sanctions from the lens of principals who have successfully turned around a failing school. Nor is there much research on the principals’ perceptions of the NCLB sanctions’ impact on the communities they served once the transformation occurred. This chapter explains the analysis of the findings from the research participants as well as gives a descriptive narrative of the schools, communities, and turnaround strategies used
by the research participants to turn around a low-performing school while addressing NCLB sanctions.

**Identifying Participants**

I started the case study research by reviewing the Ohio Department of Education Local Report Cards. I reviewed the Ohio Big Eight Urban Districts searching for schools using the Performance Index growth over three years. I was searching for schools demonstrating growth by moving schools from Academic Emergency/Watch to Effective. I researched Local Report Cards on the Ohio Department of Education website data from 2005 through 2013. After looking over Ohio Big Eight Urban Districts report card data for the turnaround criteria listed above, I refined my search, focusing on two Ohio Big Eight Urban Districts. I limited the search to two districts for the purpose of proximity to the research participants. In order to facilitate my research and conduct a series of three interviews with principals who met the criteria for school turnaround, I needed to be close to the participants. I focused on two Ohio Big Eight Urban Districts each within a 25-mile radius.

In my search for research participants, I targeted participants looking for a female and a male. Once I was able to find two principals in separate Big Eight Urban Districts within a 25-mile radius of my home and each met the research criteria of moving a school from Academic Emergency or Academic Watch to the Effective rating within a three-year period, I contacted the potential research participants. My research goal was to have one White and one Black participant. My desire to have a male perspective and a female perspective was to gain differing perspectives and enhance the credibility of the qualitative case study.
My first contact with each participant was over the phone. I spoke with each principal about my research topic and background. Once we had established a conversation, I asked each principal if they would be interested in participating in my research. When I received a verbal commitment, I was able to send confirmation emails to each participant. After e-mailing each research participant and gaining confirmation for participation in the research, I submitted the HSRB proposal to the university for approval to conduct research. Upon receiving permission to conduct my qualitative research, I sent each participant, a consent form, and a copy of the research questions I would be using for our first interview.

During the process of approximately three months between finding the research participants, completing a defense of my research proposal, and completing the Human Subject Review Board application, I was able to talk with the principals to find out their current positions and address some of their questions about my research. These discussions prior to the actual interviews afforded me the chance to learn a bit more about the participants. They, in turn, learned a little bit more about me. I felt these early conversations eased the potential tension in our first round of interviews and the principals felt more at ease discussing the turnaround process used at each of their schools as well as the impact of NCLB sanctions on their staff members and communities.

I received approval to conduct research in October of 2016. I researched the Ohio Department of Education Local Report Card data and established the 25-mile radius for research participants along with identifying the principals for the research after the oral defense of my proposal in July of 2016. My committee provided me guidance on number
of principals and districts for my research to enhance credibility. I contacted each research participant in October to set up a schedule for interviews. Mona’s (pseudonym) first interview took place on October 21, 2016. She chose a local bookstore in a small Ohio Midwestern city located approximately 20 miles from the school district where she worked. Our first interview lasted approximately 2.5 hours and I used a set of semi-structured questions (see Appendix B). These semi-structured questions were also the first set of interview questions I used with Henry (pseudonym). My first interview with Henry was conducted on October 31, 2016, and this interview took place at a small, private Christian school where he currently serves as head principal and a teacher.

**Stanton Elementary School**

Mona is a White female in her late 40s, and she is the former principal of Stanton Elementary School (pseudonym) in one of Ohio’s Big Eight Urban Districts. The school district is located in Northeastern Ohio in a city once known as the Rubber Capital of the world. She has served as a school administrator for over 15 years. When Mona assumed the responsibilities as the head principal of Stanton Elementary School, the building was in School Improvement Status Year 4. The school was designated Academic Watch based on the Ohio Performance Index and had been for the previous two years (Ohio Department of Education Local Report Card, 2012). During her first year as principal, she and her staff were able to make tremendous academic gains moving the school rating from Academic Watch to Effective.

According to Mona, Stanton Elementary School is located in a working-class neighborhood and the majority of the students walk to school or parents bring them to school. The student demographic population is diverse with subgroups of African
American, economically disadvantaged, multiracial, students with disabilities, and White students. Mona stated, “When I was assigned to Stanton Elementary school from Reid Elementary School (pseudonym), I was designated as a “turnaround principal.” During our interview process which took place 5 years after Mona successfully moved Stanton from Academic Watch (D) rating to an Effective (B) rating, Mona stated that the school was about 50% African American and about 50% White. As I researched Stanton’s 2011-2012 information, I found it was actually 31.4% African American and 55.2% White (Ohio Department of Education Local Report Card, 2012). The multi-racial population is 12.4% which may account for the 50-50 proportionality mentioned by Mona. Surprisingly, Stanton Elementary school is 100% economically disadvantaged (Ohio Department of Education, Local Report Card, 2012).

Mona suggested the school neighborhood was predominantly family homes with very few apartments, which seemed odd with a 100% economically disadvantaged label. Further discussion with Mona helped to explain the 100% poverty rating. Mona explained the school district qualified for universal free lunch so all buildings participating in the free lunch program are listed as 100% economically disadvantaged. During the first year as principal at Stanton, Mona’s students were relocated to Goodwill Middle School (pseudonym) due to renovations taking place at Stanton. Stanton was a neighborhood school prior to Mona’s arrival. The students eventually moved back to the original neighborhood school, but because of renovations, they were required to relocate. The relocation occurred in the midst of removing the former principal and the appointment of Mona. The move presented problems for parents as well as for students. Mona stated:
We were getting a new building so the whole school had to relocate or transition into Goodwill Middle School (pseudonym). Prior to my arrival, they had closed down Stanton so I had the privilege of moving into a middle school as a swing space. The teachers were very upset as well as the parents. The school was structurally in bad shape and parents were in an uproar, so they decided to take kids out. They said, “We are not sending our kids there.” Our little kids couldn’t even get a drink out of the water fountains. The school was originally a high school so you can imagine the urinals and fountains were so much larger because it was built for a different population. We bused the entire building to the swing space and we went to 100% of our students being bused to the new swing space. We were there for two years. The challenge, in addition to moving the school academically, was moving to a new location. Teachers don’t want to be there. Parents don’t want their children there, and I am the new principal after the last principals had been removed.

During our interview, Mona stated, “The socioeconomic is working class so you had some of your more affluent and some of your lower socioeconomic students so it was a mix, but the school had not shown any academic progress.” She explained during our discussion that the district Stanton is located in is 100% economically disadvantaged, and this explained the ODE report card listing Stanton as 100% when she felt it was actually closer to 80%. Mona exuded confidence in her students and her students’ abilities. Mona’s expectations for her students and staff were very high. She did not feel her students’ economic status was a barrier to increased academic performance and would not allow her staff to lower expectations due to the high degree of poverty in the building.
The closing of Stanton for renovations and moving to a middle school campus along with the academic status of the school were not viewed as obstacles. Mona seemed to view them as part of the job of a turnaround principal.

When Mona was assigned to Stanton Elementary, the previous principal had been removed due to poor academic performance and School Improvement Year 4 status. Meyers (2012) listed removing the principal or reconstituting the staff at a school failing to demonstrate expected growth also known as Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) over four years as an option of the NCLB sanctions policy (see Appendix D). Stanton Elementary school was in School Improvement Status Year 4 when Mona took over as the principal. Mona and her Stanton staff came out of School Improvement status and met AYP during her first year.

**Strategies for Turnaround**

Mona noted that challenges existed prior to her arrival at Stanton, yet during the interviews, she continued to demonstrate optimism. Mona often laughed and spoke favorably of the lessons learned from the University of Virginia training she participated in prior to her appointment at Stanton Elementary. The first strategy Mona mentioned was “quick wins.” She stated the University of Virginia training spoke directly to the importance of identifying quick wins prior to going. According to Mona, “When you are going into a situation, you want to identify things that are important to others that you can attack and accomplish to let them know their voice and choice is being heard both from the community as well as from the teachers.”

Before Mona moved to Stanton Elementary School, the school had one of the highest enrollments of all the elementary schools in this Ohio Big Eight District. Mona
explained that at her first staff meeting she asked the staff to identify three things they felt worked, three things they would like to give up, and three qualities of a good administrator. In addition, she asked the staff to list all the professional development they had participated in over the last three years. The Three Strategy is used to provide voice and choice and allow staff to share input on what the building would look like and to assist with prioritizing programs and process for success.

Mona demonstrated a propensity, during the interviews and discussions, focused on relationship-building as a strategy to turn around her school. She stated she believed education is relational and there is no magic bullet, “you dig in, you work together, and you move in the same direction.” She mentioned on more than one occasion the importance of hearing from her staff to get input and the importance of the staff being able to have a voice. During our interviews and discussion, Mona spoke about voice and choice being necessary for buy-in and getting the relationships established to move the building.

Mona continually discussed the importance of establishing relationships and taking the time to get to know her staff. She often talked about understanding the affirmations each of her staff needed as individuals or as grade-level teams. One of the themes that emerged from our second interview in November was the staff bonding that took place. Mona stated, “The deplorable conditions of the new swing space at the middle school created a need for the staff to do something to make the school more attractive to parents.” Stanton Elementary lost 114 students in her first year (Ohio Department of Education Local Report Card, 2012). Mona suggested it was not due to academic status
of the school but the deplorable conditions of the swing space and parents not wanting their children to be bused across town.

In addition to moving students from Stanton to the middle school swing space, Mona discussed the redistricting that took place for students from Stanton. Mona expressed the redistricting did not occur because of Stanton’s academic status.

Redistricting did result in students being bused to a neighboring school. Mona explained the busing to Bluffton Elementary (pseudonym) was a result of two factors. One factor was the renovations taking place at Stanton, which meant busing them out of their neighborhood. The second factor was the low enrollment at Bluffton Elementary, which was a new construction building, and the district wanting to increase enrollment at that site. Mona listed these as reasons for the significant decline in enrollment.

As a result of the loss of students, in addition to the removal of the principals due to NCLB sanctions, the staff wanted to change the atmosphere of the middle school building. The staff started by painting the cafeteria. After the cafeteria, each hallway was painted. Each team of staff members used a thematic-based concept. The themes were developed for elementary aged students to make the building more attractive to the students and the parents, who were sourly displeased with moving their children to a school that was not in good condition and designed for middle school-aged students.

Table 2 displays the growth made at Stanton Elementary school during the turnaround process. The table lists school year, performance index rating, school improvement status, percentage of students testing below grade level equivalency as well as the enrollment of Stanton Elementary school. Mona became principal in 2011-2012.
She and her staff moved the school from Academic Watch (D) rating to Effective (B) rating in one year.

Table 2

Stanton Elementary School Performance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Performance Rating</th>
<th>Improvement Status</th>
<th>Students below grade level on state tests</th>
<th>Enrollment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2009-2010</td>
<td>73.9% Academic Watch</td>
<td>Year 3 AYP Not Met</td>
<td>52.5%</td>
<td>457</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010-2011</td>
<td>78.3% Academic Watch</td>
<td>Year 4 AYP Not Met</td>
<td>44.6%</td>
<td>495</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011-2012</td>
<td>85.9% Effective</td>
<td>Met AYP</td>
<td>33.1%</td>
<td>381</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Perceptions on NCLB Sanctions

During the course of the semistructured interviews with Mona, I asked specific questions pertinent to her perceptions on NCLB sanctions after successfully turning around a low-performing school. Appendix C contains the questions used with both principals on their views regarding the perceptions of urban school principals on NCLB after successfully turning around a low-performing school. Mona’s responses were recounted in this section while Henry’s results were recorded in the findings section specific to his school.

After I reviewed the interview transcripts, I looked at similarities and patterns for coding themes that emerged from each principal. Although both research participants worked in different Ohio Big Eight Urban Districts, when NCLB sanctions were addressed, busing, removal of staff, and student enrollment were key concepts of discussion. When I asked Mona about the impact of the NCLB sanctions on her school,
several points emerged from our interviews. One of the first themes that emerged from the transcriptions was how removing the principal at Stanton Elementary School affected the staff. A second theme emerged from the interviews of busing students from the previous neighborhood school to the relocation site or swing space as it was described by Mona. The busing affected the neighborhood school concept and parents’ desire to have their elementary children close to home. Finally, a third theme became evident regarding the impact of sanctions after successfully turning around a low-performing school and this was declining enrollment. One of the sanctions for low-performing schools is school choice for students and parents.

According to Ravitch (2010), removing a principal for lack of performance in a building becomes an option once a school has failed to demonstrate adequate yearly progress for four or more years (see Appendix D). This means a school must be in School Improvement Status year 4 or beyond. Ravitch stated:

In the third year of a school’s failure, students are entitled to free tutoring after school. In subsequent years, the failing school may be converted to private management, turned into a charter, have its entire staff dismissed or handed over to the state. (2010, p. 5)

When Mona was assigned to Stanton Elementary School, the building was in School Improvement Status year 4. Mona stated, “Both principals were removed; they did not tell the staff it was because of the low performance or because of NCLB sanctions, but I believe it had something to do with that.” I asked Mona if she believed removing the principals was a NCLB sanction she agreed when she said “Yes.” Mona stated, “Removing the principals created a sense of urgency in the staff. The district was
basically saying to the staff we are done talking now; we are taking this seriously.” Mona went on to suggest removing the principals along with the S/I Year 4 status created a sense of urgency and stated, “That’s how you get staff to move is to create a sense of urgency.” She explained how the assistant superintendent came into her building to meet with the staff as part of the transition. By removing the administration, it demonstrated to the staff that the school board and district were taking the sanctions seriously. Mona stated, “If it is just a threat and it stops at the threat, then nothing moves forward.”

The theme of savior versus servant was explored with both participants. Mona was a very spiritual individual and spoke during the interview about the importance of her relationship with the Lord. Her spirituality provided her with a sense of stability in the midst of constant change. She mentioned the success she had at a former building and how resources for support of students were removed as she got closer to reaching the goals for the building. Her placement at Stanton was not a choice but a reassignment after not obtaining a position within the district she applied for in central office for school transformation. When asked whether or not she felt it was her job to save the school or serve the students, she was very quick with her response. Mona stated:

I think saving is an outcome; it is short-sighted. Our position as educators is always to serve regardless of where we are asked to serve. It is a family; you treat it like a family and all kids deserve our 110% regardless of whether or not you want to be there or rather or not, you asked to be there. My personal opinion is this is where the Lord has you. Our goal is to serve; this is where the Lord has you. This is where you serve. As an educator, our job is always to serve; saving is an outcome; it is our job to serve wherever the Lord places you.
I conducted my second interview with Mona on November 22, 2016, by phone while she was vacationing in Florida. The second interview focused on the declining enrollment, busing of students, and exploring her perceptions of NCLB sanctions’ influence on the declining enrollment and staffing. The focus on these three topics was a result of questions that emerged from our initial interview.

Mona was assigned to her school, not recruited. Her ability to move a school from Academic Watch to Effective in her first year demonstrates unique focus and staff buy-in to the instructional plan. The 11-point gain on the Performance Index rating she and her staff made in one year and moving from School Improvement Status Year 4 to meeting AYP and coming out of School Improvement status is not common.

Mona was clear that relationships are critical to her success for both students and staff. Mona started her tenure at Stanton Elementary focusing on creating a culture that was conducive to learning and working with her staff to develop unity in the face of adversity. This was noted in the fact the staff came in to paint the cafeteria and work on thematic-based designs for the hallways and sections of the middle school while the students were away from Stanton for two years. Mona’s staff developed common assessments for their students by following the four critical questions by DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, and Many (2010), “What do we want them to learn?” “How will we know when they have learned it?” “What will we do for those who haven’t?” “What about those who already know it?”

Mona was willing to go above the call of duty to work with parents. She spoke during our first interview about being willing to stay after school for parents who were late to pick up their children as well as assisting parents by coming to school early and
letting them drop off their children prior to school starting so parents could make it to work on time. She demonstrated a servant mindset with parents as customers. Mona stated, “My assistant principal and I rode the school busses home every day for at least four weeks.” When asked why she said it was because all students were bused to the swing site at Goodwill, but what is significant is riding the busses home is not required. Mona did this to let parents know their children were valued and she cared. Caring for students, an attitude to serve wherever placed by the Lord and a laser focus on using data to inform decisions emerged as the patterns I attribute to Mona’s successful turnaround of a low-performing school from our interviews and review of my notes.

**Seventh Elementary School (pseudonym)**

Principal Henry is an African American male in his mid-forties who took over Seventh Elementary School during the 2004-2005 school years. The school is located in one of Ohio’s Big Eight Urban Districts in a small Midwestern city sometimes called the Hall of Fame City. Seventh Elementary school was his first assignment as a head principal. The school demographics showed approximately 45% White and approximately 40% African American with a 15% multiracial population (Ohio Department of Education Local Report Card, 2004-2005). The building served an 85% economically disadvantaged student population. The grade configuration was Pre-Kindergarten through sixth grade with a student population of approximately 286 students during his first year. When Henry started at Seventh Elementary, the school was in Academic Watch and was in School Improvement At-Risk status (Ohio Department of Education Local Report Card, 2004-2005).
Seventh Elementary School is located in a residential neighborhood with a large auto dealership directly across the street. There are several “mom and pop businesses”, as Henry described them, within walking distance. The majority of Henry’s students walked to school and came from the surrounding neighborhood. The name of the school was changed several years prior to Henry’s becoming the principal. It was renamed to Seventh (pseudonym to recognize a renowned educator in the Big Eight district. Henry stated, “My first year we had a lot of two-parent homes with blue collar, working families with very few rentals.” He felt that there was a good group of children and families who were making it work and thought that the families really wanted the best for their children and it was evident by the support he received. He mentioned that a little further down the street was a sister school where almost all the parents owned homes and were on the higher end economically. During our interview. Henry stated, “We did well with that population; we were able to make strides. Just knowing that they could do the work, we focused on the test, getting the information out to the parents and letting them know we wanted to make strides with their children.”

Henry said that the demographics of the school were approximately 40% White and 60% African American. According to Ohio Department of Education Local Report Card, 2004-2005, African American students counted for 36.8% of the population, while White students accounted for 45.6%. In addition, Seventh Elementary had a 15% multiracial population, and over the course of Henry’s turnaround process, his students with disabilities population ranged from 20-25%. Unlike Mona, when Henry took over as principal, he was not placed at his school because of NCLB sanctions. Henry took over under different circumstances. Seventh Elementary was not in School Improvement
Status yet. Seventh Elementary was listed in School Improvement At-Risk status. This means Seventh Elementary had failed to reach AYP for at least one year but not two consecutive years.

Henry came in under different circumstances regarding sanctions and this afforded him time to work with his staff. He was not under the same degree of academic duress Mona felt as she came in specifically as a turnaround principal. Although Seventh was not required to enforce NCLB sanctions when Henry arrived as principal, the school was rated Academic Watch (D) status along with School Improvement At-Risk rating. Henry stated:

The staff distrusted the former principal and did not feel safe. They felt like the former principal allowed the parents to run the school and kids were all over the place. Parents came in and said what they wanted to say and do what they wanted to do with the staff; they did not feel protected.

It should also be noted that at the time of Henry’s taking over as principal at Seventh, the Ohio Proficiency Test changed from the fourth-grade reading, writing, and math testing to testing reading, writing, math, science, and citizenship in third grade through sixth grade. The change in testing from fourth grade only to testing third grade through sixth grade students placed a shared responsibility on all the intermediate grade teachers, who in the past, did not have to address accountability concerning state testing. The change in testing occurred during the 2005-2006 school years.

**The Turnaround Process**

Although Seventh Elementary School was in At-Risk status and rated Academic Watch Henry’s first year, he faced the unexpected pressure of competition.
Elementary School (pseudonym) located within walking distance of Seventh was rated Effective. The Effective rating at Wilmington afforded parent choice if Seventh Elementary failed to make adequate yearly progress for a second year falling into School Improvement Year 2 status. School choice and the possibility of losing students, all sanctions under NCLB placed pressure on Henry to move his school academically.

Henry was able to move Seventh from Academic Watch to Effective over three years from 2005-2007. His progress was gradual, moving from Academic Watch in 2005-2006 to Continuous Improvement in 2006-2007, and finally to Effective in 2007-2008 (Ohio Department of Education Local Report Card, 2007-2008). Mona’s move from Academic Watch to Effective took place over the course of one school year. Henry’s process was gradual and took place over the course of three consecutive years of movement. When asked about his turnaround process Henry stated:

The first thing I did was work to unite the staff to let them know we are all in this together. We will raise our test scores and that I am here to back them up, and be the principal they want me to be. I will discipline the kids and let them know that parents are not able to come and just do (laugh). Just the safety and security part of it and just getting the morale up was my first thing. I really acted like I was Joe Clark (laughing). That first year we could still paddle so I had my paddle under my arm most of the time. I hate to say that, but that was the truth. I had to make sure my discipline was on point; that was my first goal. So once I got all the kids in line, I identified staff members who were on board. Not everybody was on board, but once I found the staff members who were, we started to focus on reading first like everybody else.
When Henry was asked how he identified staff that was on board, he stated:

It was not scientific. I identified through a feeling that this person was with me. They came up with ideas. You could tell they wanted to see a change with the kids. I would put something out there and they would come in and say, “Oh, I can do or oh I can’t do it.”

As I listened during our second interview, I could see themes of insuring safety and security were in place for both students and staff members. Henry’s approach seemed more in line in being a disciplinarian, but as he began to explain his process, a pattern of genuine concern for the well-being of both students and staff was evident. Henry also attributed a great deal of his successful turnaround to his Title I teaching staff and credited a district administrator for providing him with a core of instructional specialists who were dynamic and became a central core of his turnaround process.

One process that stood out in my notes and through my coding process was the use of a consistent pattern of standardization. Henry stated, “We wanted every test our students took to look like the proficiency test or the OAT, or OAA, so when our students took the tests they were confident like I’ve seen this before and I can do this.”

During our second interview, Henry also said he wanted his students to see the test and he wanted the students to see it often from the graphs to the tables and the format. One of his strategies was to present OAA-styled tests for progress monitoring as often as possible. Henry noted he had one teacher who made all her tests look like the OAA, everything from the font to the bar graphs. We wanted our students to have confidence and familiarity with the test. We progressed, monitored often, and we taught to the test. Our goal was for the students to have confidence when test time came.
Henry suggested that using the Title I teaching staff for class size reduction in tested grades was an effective strategy for his school. Henry stated, “The Director of Federal Programs (name withheld) insured that all Title I teachers were top quality teachers and I had a Title I team that was incredible.” When I discussed the savior versus servant mentality with Henry, his comments were similar to Mona’s. Both administrators are very spiritual people and spoke of God and their own individual relationship with God. Henry also serves as an associate pastor at his church.

When I asked Henry if he felt an obligation to serve the students or try to save the school as he found himself more in-depth with academic issues based on Seventh Elementary academic status, Henry responded, “Serve, I can’t save nobody, but I can serve as many people as I possibly can, and we wanted to make sure that we served a good quality education.” Both educators in this case study spoke consistently on the need to serve the students in their individual schools and communities as opposed to feeling a need or obligation to save the school. I was surprised at the responses even though both principals had unique circumstances and each building was at a different point regarding implementation of NCLB sanctions. Mona’s school had already seen principals removed and was in S/I year 4 status while Henry’s first four years never found Seventh above S/I year 1. Yet, in spite of the different levels of sanctions imposed, each felt an imperative obligation to serve students.

**NCLB Sanctions**

When Henry took over as principal at Seventh Elementary, the school did not have NCLB sanctions imposed on it. Parents and students did not have school choice. There was no reconstitution of staff. The penalties came during his second year. Henry
had to send out a letter letting the parents know their children were attending a school that was underperforming. Myers (2012) research suggested, “In year one school is put on notice for failing to make AYP” (p. 2). Sending out the letter caused a mix of emotions for Henry and his staff. The letter sent a mixed message to the community. The school was making progress by his third year and moved to Continuous Improvement, but failed to make AYP with specific subgroups at the school. When asked how the letters to the parents influenced parent perception or attitude toward the school Henry stated:

   We moved from Watch to Continuous Improvement, then Effective for three years in a row. We were not meeting AYP so we had to send out letters. Parents thought they should have been able to go somewhere else. They thought our school was doing poorly; and when they found out they could not pick up and leave, some parents left anyway because they made a big stink about it. We were not making AYP, but we were Effective so students did not have choice to attend other schools.

   Henry was the principal of a school rated Effective, yet he had to send out letters based on subgroup underperformance. Henry was in a unique situation, and by his third year Seventh Elementary was in Continuous Improvement status. By year four, he had met Effective status. This move from Academic Watch to Effective over three years 2005-2008 met the turnaround criteria, but the impact of NCLB sanctions for Seventh had a different effect.

   After meeting AYP with his subgroups, which included White, multiracial, Black, economically disadvantaged, and students with disabilities (Ohio Department of
Education Local Report Card, 2006-2007), Seventh found itself in a unique predicament. Henry stated, “It was after reaching Effective, that Summon Elementary School in the district closed, and I received the majority of the students from the school.” During our interview and after viewing the transcribed notes, I noticed Henry had stated:

We were doing fine, I thought. For a while we had gotten to Effective and then they closed Summon Elementary School to reopen it later as Summon School of the Performing Arts. The students were bused to three schools. I received many of those students. We actually got the majority of those kids. We made it our business to know what other schools were doing anyway. We determined that we had a better education than they were serving at their school, and ironically, the subgroup we were not meeting was our White students. It is a phenomenon I can’t put my finger on, but those parents were upset at their kids coming to my school. They felt that they were coming to a Black school and we were actually outperforming their predominately White school.

Henry was in a much different situation than Mona was when he took over Seventh Elementary School. Mona’s school was in School Improvement Status Year 4. As stated by Myers (2012), “in the fourth year of failing to make AYP the school is required to take corrective action which may include curriculum changes, staff changes, or longer student contact times” (p. 2). Henry and Seventh although rated Academic Watch from 2004-2006, only found themselves in School Improvement Status Year 1 at the end of his second year as principal. The table below demonstrates the progress over four years. HCRB moved from Academic Watch to Effective in a three-year period from 2005-2008.
Table 3

*Seventh Street Elementary Progress*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Performance Rating</th>
<th>Improvement Status</th>
<th>Students below grade level on state tests</th>
<th>Enrollment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2004-5</td>
<td>73.5% Academic Watch</td>
<td>At Risk</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>268</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005-6</td>
<td>74.4% Academic Watch</td>
<td>Year 1</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>297</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006-7</td>
<td>77.2% Continuous Improvement</td>
<td>Met AYP Delay</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>282</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007-8</td>
<td>82% Effective</td>
<td>Met AYP</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>281</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


As the third interview was concluded in December 2016, Henry provided suggestions on potential solutions to some of the difficulties NCLB sanctions have created. Henry was in favor of some of the accountability measures that came about as a result of the NCLB policy. These measures included subgroup accountability and testing to determine student progress. Henry was not in favor of reconstitution or removal of the principal as Mona was. Each principal came into his or her respective schools under different circumstances. Henry commented, “The only thing that truly works in urban districts is moving boundaries of the school or district.” Henry stated, “This has always been and will forever be a case of the have-nots and those who have, when you have all the poor children in one school or district it will take more than money to make a difference.” Henry seemed to be suggesting that schools need to be integrated based on economic status as opposed to racial boundaries and combining students with a variety of social
economic statuses in the same school could help with turning around schools as opposed to imposing sanctions.

**Financial Implications**

As I continued to research the financial implications of NCLB sanctions on the two Big Eight Urban districts used for this case study, I was amazed at the annual yearly costs associated with students leaving the Ohio Big Eight Urban Districts, and the two districts used for this case study in particular. According to the data gathered from the Ohio Department of Education (ODE) by the Ohio Education Association (OEA) in conjunction with the group Innovation Ohio on their website (www.knowyourcharter.com) Henry’s Midwestern Ohio Urban Big Eight District transferred $8,933,545.00 to charter schools in one year. Of the eight million plus dollars lost to charter schools, $1,254,095.00 comes from local taxpayer subsidy. Mona’s Ohio Big Eight Urban School District also saw a tremendous financial burden associated with charter schools sanctioned under the NCLB policies for schools failing to make AYP or having an underperforming school. Mona’s district transferred $32,427,295.00 to charter schools in 2015. Of the 32 million plus dollars transferred, local taxpayer dollars accounted for $7,211,617.00 dollars (Ohio Education Association, Knowyourcharter.com, 2017).

The financial loss to Ohio Big Eight Urban School districts has placed a tremendous burden on urban superintendents. These districts are all predominately low social economic status, and each district has a predominately minority student population (see Table 1). When asked about the propensity to agree with some NCLB sanctions and not others, both Henry and Mona were in agreement on the notion that charter schools
have not demonstrated any greater success than the local public school districts and the charter schools do not have the same accountability as the public school districts. When asked why he was against charter schools, Henry stated, “Charter schools have very little, if any, accountability, teachers are not qualified, and they lag behind public schools academically, and money to fund them is taken from good public schools.” Although Mona was also against charter schools for some of the reasons listed, she was not opposed to students being able to attend parochial schools using school choice.

Questionnaire Findings

In addition to the interviews with the two Urban Big Eight School District principals, I also submitted a questionnaire to public school educators. The questionnaire was posted online for over three months using Survey Monkey. To solicit participants for the questionnaire, I used a snowball sampling method as discussed in the methodology section of the dissertation. I e-mailed the questionnaire to colleagues in the Cuyahoga County First Ring districts via the TALK-Network. The TALK-Network is a group of Cuyahoga County school administrators, directors, superintendents, and principals. There are over 17 districts represented in the TALK-Network ranging from Cleveland Metropolitan, Cleveland Heights, Bedford, Orange, North Olmstead, and East Cleveland to Solon, Ohio. Members completed the survey and shared with colleagues in other Ohio districts.

I received 41 responses to the NCLB Sanctions questionnaire. Of the 41 responses, I received 15 responses from individuals who identified themselves as White. Twenty participants listed themselves as African American, five people listed multiracial and one individual listed the racial group as Hispanic. Participant responses included 22
females and 19 males. Twenty-two participants listed their school district as urban. Eleven respondents listed suburban as the type of district which they represented. Four participants listed rural district and four respondents listed private, charter, or other (see Appendix E).

Of the 41 participant responses, I received feedback from representatives of four of the Ohio Big Eight Urban districts. Over 80% of the participant responses came from school employees ranging from teachers, school administrators, principals, directors, and central office administration. Surprisingly, I did receive responses from four parents, a consultant, and a court staff member. The responses from the NCLB Sanctions questionnaires were then viewed using a Likert scale to look for highly to strongly agree versus highly to strongly disagree with the specific sanctions. The findings from the questionnaire aligned, in most cases, with the perceptions of the principals with the exception of two sanctions.

Overwhelmingly, the participant responses in the questionnaire strongly disagreed with NCLB sanctions’ effectiveness with low-performing schools. Responses on the effectiveness of NCLB sanctions ranged from: “Not helping and not realistic” to “NCLB has been remarkably effective at expanding charter schools that are relatively unaccountable and worse than the public schools.” Another participant response on the effectiveness of NCLB sanctions for low-performing schools put it this way:

So, if NCLB had a hidden agenda of increasing inequality, perpetuating suburban superiority and playing into the most undemocratic, worst angles of our society, it has been remarkably effective. Has it helped the schools that need the most help or the students and families that count on them? No.
Mona suggested that removing the principal as a sanction helped to increase the urgency of staff in her school. She also discussed the increased urgency as a catalyst to improving the student test performance with the staff. Although she agreed with this sanction, Henry’s perception was this was not a means of improving the instructional program and increasing student achievement. The questionnaire participant responses were similar to our two urban school principals’ answers and the results seemed to be split on this sanction as well, with 31 respondents disagreeing with this option, yet 10 respondents were neutral or agreed with removing the principal. One respondent stated, “There are great teachers who are not effective for every student, there are also great principals who may or may not be effective in any given building to that extent interest-based choice for students can be an effective strategy, however that is not how ‘choice’ tends to work in NCLB.” Another respondent said, “In some instances it may allow the district or the principal to choose its own staffs and the root causes may be the bureaucracy of the district systems that are impeding the growth and grass roots efforts at the building level.” The neutral to agree comments on removing the principal led me to look deeper at the second question on sanctions that seemed to uncover a difference of opinion regarding sanctions—the question of school choice vouchers, which enable students to attend private schools, based on the current level of performance of the student’s neighborhood school.

Twenty-three respondents disagreed with allowing students to use Ohio Education Choice Vouchers for students in low-performing schools to attend private schools. Yet, 18 participant responses indicated neutral or agreement with the private school option for students. The responses were very strong on their comments with regard to Ed. Choice
vouchers. The responses, which I think summarized the difference, came from a public school educator who stated:

I live in the district I work in. I support public education because that is my profession; however, I am uncomfortable sending my youngest son to any school in this district because I don’t feel the district is moving in the right direction. I don’t feel the state of Ohio nor is the federal government moving in the right direction either.

Another school administrator stated it this way:

Education Choice vouchers enable parents that understand the importance to get their children to an environment with other students whose parents care about education, but is devastating to the schools where the parents use schools as a means for getting students out of the house.

Although the questionnaire was used as a means to triangulate the principal responses and to look for recurring patterns and themes from multiple educators across the region, it was not the focus of the case study. The participant responses were coded based on reviewing disagreement or agreement of NCLB sanctions. The comments, which supported or refuted the perceptions of the two case study principals, were then reviewed. Once statements of agreement or disagreement were tabulated, in almost all cases, with the exception of removing the principal and private school vouchers, the majority of the findings aligned with the principals’ perceptions on the ineffectiveness of NCLB sanctions as a means to increase student achievement and move underperforming schools to high levels of achievement. Stated plainly, overwhelmingly the participants in this research case study did not feel NCLB sanctions were effective for urban schools.
For the purpose of this study, moving a school from Academic Emergency or Watch to an Effective rating was used to define school turnaround. Each of the case study principals was able to move his or her school using these criteria in three or less years. None of the questionnaire participants was required to be a principal or demonstrate school turnaround status, nor was it required for their participation. The focus and findings of this section were based on the interviews and discussions with principals who turned around low-performing schools while under the scrutiny of NCLB sanctions. The questionnaire responses provided an array of opinions from a larger audience, which then were viewed based on the findings from exploring the perceptions of urban school principals on NCLB sanctions who have successfully turned around a low-performing school.

**Summary**

Exploring the perceptions of urban school principals on NCLB sanctions after successfully turning around a low-performing school was the research question for this study. The study was designed to provide educators, policy actors, as well as interested scholars, a view of the lens of practitioners who turned around low-performing schools in the era of NCLB accountability. The research participants selected for the study both served as principals in Ohio Big Eight Urban School Districts. Each principal increased his or her school’s performance index rating from Academic Watch to Effective in less than three years. Each participant was able to demonstrate a minimum of a 10 percentage point increase in the number of students meeting grade level expectations in three or less years, therefore, meeting the specifications of a school turnaround as defined by Herman et al. (2008).
The findings in this chapter suggest there are a few critical elements to successful school transformation and or turnaround. Both principals started the turnaround process by uniting their staffs. Henry established this by providing an environment of safety for staff and students. For Henry, carrying a paddle with him throughout his school to establish order, in his opinion, helped to set the tone and culture of a disciplined approach to education. Mona used affirmations and worked heavily on relationship-building processes looking at the “quick wins” approach.

Each principal moved quickly to a process of standardization of routines. Each used frequent monitoring of student instructional processes with a focus on the DuFour et al. (2010) instructional model as a foundation. Both principals used common assessments to gauge progress. Henry’s process of standardization included quizzes and tests which mirrored the OAA test in font and format. This was a critical element for Seventh Elementary. The standardization format served to provide confidence for students once the actual test was administered.

Serving the students and the community versus saving the school was a critical mindset. NCLB sanctions have not been effective as a means to turnaround low-performing schools was a common theme. Yet, while both principals did not believe school choice or charter schools were effective NCLB sanctions, Mona did agree with reconstitution and felt removing the principal created urgency. The questionnaire responses supported Mona’s thoughts with 18 of the 41 responses either neutral or agreeing with removing the principal as an effective NCLB sanction.

Finally, the research participants suggested that in order to turnaround a low-performing school, the leader must set the tone. The leader must set the vision and
expectation that all students will learn. The principal must model the way displaying the behaviors he or she wants the staff to emulate. The principal as servant versus savior approach discussed by both principals included working beyond the school day, going into their students’ communities and going into student homes to reach parents. The individual spirituality of both principals increased their strong self-efficacy. Both principals’ attitude can be stated simply as “We will increase the achievement of the students at our school in spite of poverty or undesirable circumstances!”
CHAPTER V

Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

In this chapter, I address the summary of my research findings as well as conclusions drawn from the analysis of the findings based on the conceptual framework and theoretical frameworks used for this study. Chapter V includes recommendations and implications for future studies based on the unique experiences of the individual participants as well as the questionnaire findings. Chapter V provides a summary of the review of data and multiple articles associated with NCLB sanctions which emerged during the dissertation and research process.

The purpose of this qualitative research case study was to explore the question, “How have NCLB sanctions affected schools, communities, and staffs in urban districts from the perspective of the principal?” The emphasis of this study focused on the perceptions of urban principals who have successfully turned around low-performing buildings as defined by Herman et al. (2008) and the Ohio Department of Education Performance Index rating system. Each principal’s school was in School Improvement status for failing to make AYP. Each school’s initial Performance Index rating placed them in Academic Watch (D). Each principal was able to raise the performance index rating to Effective (B) in three or fewer years. Thus, each research participant increased the performance of his or her school by 10 or more points in three or fewer years as required to meet the selection criteria.
Summary of Major Findings

A summary of the major findings of my research includes three major themes. The first theme to emerge from the findings was the principal leadership. Each principal expressed the need to serve as opposed to save the school during the turnaround process. The second theme was the focused approach on uniformity of testing and teaching as a turnaround strategy. In both cases this included using DuFour et al. (2010) four critical questions with an intense focus of insuring teacher expectations of increasing student achievement included teaching to the standards or teaching to the test. The third theme that emerged was the enacted values versus the espoused values of NCLB sanctions’ financial impact on Ohio Big Eight Urban schools.

These themes were discovered through the analysis of the two research participant’s responses and review of notes. The 41 responses from the questionnaires were used to triangulate the data. The investigation of the financial implications of NCLB sanctions on Ohio’s Big Eight Urban districts revealed a truly impactful moment of synthesis for me as a researcher.

Each principal expressed an overwhelming response on serving the students and community as opposed to saving his or her school. Both principals spoke with urgency and conviction on the importance of staff using the DuFour et al. (2010) critical questions. The questions paraphrased include “What must the students know,” “How will we know if they know it,” and “What will we do for those who know it and those who do not?” Both Henry and Mona created an atmosphere of safety and unity with a focus on frequent monitoring of students’ learning through the use of common assessments based
on the state test. One principal, Henry, spoke of designing all the school’s tests and quizzes using the font and format of the Ohio Achievement Assessment.

The espoused values of leaving no child behind and insuring 100% of students in America were proficient in reading and math by 2014-2015 were overshadowed by the enacted value of district, state, and federal dollars being dispersed to experimental charter schools and private schools. My understanding of the financial impact of NCLB sanctions on urban districts was enhanced. The NCLB sanctions created a systemic process which provided funding for failing schools to address subgroups, and AYP, but yet, took state and federal funds out of district hands and reallocated them to experimental charter schools. Forced competition was the argument for making those “failing schools” to be turned around

According to Klein (2017) The Race to the Top Grants provided a $4 billion grant competition through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, which awarded 11 states five-year grants ranging from 75 million to 700 million dollars in exchange for designing state NCLB waiver applications which included a pledge to adopt the Common Core State Standards, and embrace a teacher evaluation system based, in part, on student outcomes.

**Servant vs. Savior Leadership**

While investigating the research question of the study, the concept of servant versus savior leadership was explored. Critical servant leadership is defined by Alston and McClellan (2011) as a way to serve and lead expanding service to individuals and institutions encouraging collaboration, trust, and providing the foundation of ethical uses of power. These authors noted that critical servant leadership has multiple components
one of which is a prophetic spirituality with a focus on personal transformation. During our interviews, Mona expressed a deep relationship with the Lord and being willing to serve wherever she was placed to do the Lord’s work. Henry is an associate pastor at his church and looked at education as a calling not a career. He is currently serving as principal at a private Christian-based school. As a researcher, I was unaware of the depth of the strong spiritual foundations of each participant, but it became very evident during our interviews.

The commonality between both principals was a desire to serve students, families, and the community. Each principal came into his or her building under different circumstances. Each principal spoke specifically to serving the students versus saving the school. Mona suggested that saving a school was short-sighted and would eventually be lost when a new administrator came in with new ideas or agendas, while serving students and families was a mission. She stated, “How your community relates to you can’t be sanctioned or mandated; you have to be willing to go into the neighborhood and go into homes.”

Henry and Mona both discussed the long days well beyond school hours and going above expectations. Mona demonstrated this through riding school buses home with her students for several weeks which provided her parents confidence. She suggested the large number of students being bused due to the relocation to Goodwill Middle School during renovations at Stanton provided anxiety to parents who were used to a neighborhood school. Mona said that staying after school to wait for parents whose students missed the bus and coming in early to allow parents to drop off kids because of conflicting work schedules were part of serving her community.
Henry addressed the servant versus savior concept with a direct, “I can’t save anybody, but I can serve them by providing them a top-notch education.” My job is to serve,” he stated. He went on to suggest that Seventh Elementary wanted to serve the students the best education possible. Henry displayed his servant leadership through his belief that his current position was a calling and not a career. Henry felt his career as an educator and his appointment as a principal were part of his calling from the Lord and were part of his purpose in life.

Henry’s second job as an associate pastor provided him with a strong spiritual foundation. This spiritual base and belief in God’s will helped to cement his self-efficacy or belief that he was capable of transforming the school culture.” With God nothing is impossible” (Luke 1:37, KJV). Henry’s strong sense of education as a calling and not a career strengthened his disciplinarian approach and worked to unite a staff that felt unprotected and distrusted the previous administrator.

Each principal relied heavily on staff to incorporate plans. Both principals also spoke of the need to provide a safe environments, unifying their individual staffs, and ensuring the teachers knew and understood the goal was to move the schools forward academically. According to Prolman (2016), a leader who knows what he or she does brings confidence. A leader who provides descriptive feedback and leads faculty to solutions increases this confidence. Prolman (2016) went on to suggest when leaders are willing to model vulnerability and honesty with staff; it brings about an atmosphere of psychological safety.

Henry and Mona’s approaches as servant leaders provided the staff's confidence. The trust, unity, and relationships built at Stanton Elementary and Seventh Elementary
through the principals’ servant mentalities helped to increased collaboration. Each principal’s confidence supported environments that were conducive to instruction as demonstrated by the increased student achievement levels on the Ohio Achievement Assessments and each school’s Performance Index rating.

**Teaching to the Standards**

While many teachers and administrators today feel teaching to the test is undermining our American education system (Walker, 2014), both principals in this study viewed teaching to the standards as a means to improve the academic achievement of students. Each principal utilized the DuFour et al. (2010) four critical questions. Each principal started by asking their teachers to identify “What must the students know,” “How will we know if they know it,” and “What will we do for those who know it and those who do not?”

By each principal utilizing the DuFour et al.’s (2010) foundational questions at staff meetings, teachers were empowered to identify mastery standards and analyze the previous state-released test questions. Henry’s approach was to be direct with his staff. During our interviews he openly stated, “We taught to the test, we designed our tests and quizzes to look like the OAA, and we assessed our students often so when they took the test they would be confident, like ‘oh we’ve seen this before’.”

As stated previously, each principal used frequent monitoring of student progress and common assessments. By each staff focusing heavily on standards aligned with the Ohio State tests, greater validity was given to what the common assessment data revealed. Thus, staff members began to feel empowered as they developed assessments
based on state testing standards and the mentality of teaching to the test was transformed to a culture of preparing the students to meet grade-level expectations.

Once the instructional and assessment expectations were clearly articulated to the teaching staffs, the process of establishing relationships and unity began. Henry and Mona’s approaches of teaching to the test or as restated teaching to the grade level expectations provided a culture which built confidence in the principal leadership. Mona stated, “I told them if they have the data to support the process that they are using is working, we’ll consider it. If not, we’re using my method.” She also stated, “I don’t look at ‘no’ as an answer but as a suggestion!” A theme of standardization was consistent in each principal’s turnaround strategies as well as a unique first step of unifying the staffs through support or addressing trust.

Teaching to a test is not popular today in most school districts (Popham, 2001). Many of the educators speak of academic freedom and lack of variability with regard to instruction as testing has taken over the flexibility they had in years prior. So much emphasis is placed on the test that students are overwhelmed. This has become a rallying cry of many unions and educators (Popham, 2001). Surprisingly, these two principals used standardization as a means of increasing the academic performance of their schools with results to support the strategy.

**NCLB Sanctions Financial Impact**

According to Ohio Education Association, which uses data from the Ohio Department of Education, Mona’s public school district transferred $32,427,295 to 43 charter schools in 2015-2016 (http://www.knowyourcharter.com). Of the 43 charter schools receiving funds from the district 58% or 25 out of 43 were rated D or F for
performance, and 15 were not rated at all. Henry’s former district transferred $8,933,545.00 to 22 charter schools of which 63% were rated D or F based on the Performance Index, and 7 were not rated at all.

According to the Ohio Department of Education Office of Federal Programs Resource Guide (2015), Mona’s Ohio Big Eight Urban District federal allocation for 2015 was $17,958,544.60 and Henry’s former Ohio Big Eight Urban district federal allocation was $7,702,732.85.00. Each district’s federal allocation is below the amount of money required to support the current level of charter school funding they currently are required to transfer based on public school choice. As a result, each district then begins to use local taxpayer dollars to address the shortfall. Table 4 demonstrates the differences and provides a visual on the dilemma.

Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>ESEA Allocation</th>
<th>Charter Expense</th>
<th>Difference</th>
<th>Local Taxes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mona</td>
<td>$17,958,544.00</td>
<td>$32,427,295.00</td>
<td>$14,468,751.00</td>
<td>$7,211,617.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henry</td>
<td>$7,702,732.00</td>
<td>$8,933,545.00</td>
<td>$1,230,813.00</td>
<td>$1,254,095.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


While the focus of this study was on the perceptions of urban school principals on NCLB sanctions after successfully turning around a low-performing school, it must be noted NCLB sanctions have a financial impact on urban school districts disproportionately as Table 4 shows specific to the two Ohio Big Eight districts where Mona and Henry worked.
NCLB was promoted as a means for all students to reach proficiency by 2014. According to Ravitch, “All states were required to establish timelines showing how 100% of their students would reach proficiency in reading and mathematics by 2013-2014” (2010, p. 97). In addition, Ravitch (2010) explained that any school not making adequate progress for every subgroup toward the goal of 100% proficiency would be labeled a school in need of improvement facing various sanctions.

The NCLB standard was 100% proficiency in reading and math for students. Ravitch (2010) explained, “All states were expected to choose their own tests, adopt three performance levels and decide for themselves how to define proficiency” (p. 97). While each state determined proficiency, the sanctions were prescribed federally. School Choice became an option by Year 2 of School Improvement status.

The goal of 100% of the students across the country in buildings receiving federal funding was not realistic from the start. Ravitch (2010) stated, “The most toxic flaw of NCLB was its legislative command that all students in every school must be proficient in reading and math by 2014” (p. 102). The fiscal obligation of NCLB sanctions on urban districts eventually led to more dependency on local tax payer dollars to subsidize the school choice options. Table 4 only addresses charter school choice options for the two districts listed; it does not, however, represent the additional private school choice voucher allocations transferred from local school districts.

While both of the principals in this study were in favor of accountability and even subgroup testing, along with disaggregating data to look at lower performing student groups, neither was in favor of charter schools. When asked why, both provided detailed descriptions of their angst for charters, Henry stated:
There is no accountability. They are not playing by the same rules, they employ large numbers of non-certified teachers, and they provide parents false beliefs of better schools when, in fact, after the students return, they often are performing much worse than when they left.

Mona stated, “Ethically, I disagree with charter schools. I believe they are a result of the public schools stuck in old habits and teacher contracts being so rigid that districts can’t make the changes needed to reach the populations we serve.” Mona also stated as a result of Stanton’s academic status, she had a Title I budget of over $200,000.00 to use for programs such as 100 book challenge, incentives and affirmations for staff and students, and to support professional development, online resources, and additional supports for her students.

Mona was not adverse to private schools as a choice for students who were in schools designated as underperforming. This aligned with the data from the questionnaire of public school educators as well. Surprisingly, over 30% were neutral or in favor of educational choice vouchers for students in schools identified as low-performing.

**Conclusions**

Although the NCLB acronym means No Child Left Behind, that is not what happened. Politicians sold the public on the acronym under school choice options for the poor students of America who found themselves in low-performing urban schools, as if there was no hope without choice. When in reality, the additional supports that once were associated with poverty now were reallocated to experimental charter schools under the espoused value of school choice. State education agencies allocated the standard federal ESEA dollars and then took funds from each district to support school choice options.
The funds in the past were sent directly to the state education agency then allocated to the local school districts with additional supports going to schools and districts in high poverty areas. In reality, the federal government under NCLB set up a systemic process that provided additional supports for failure and withdrew support when schools were demonstrating growth. According to Klein (2017), three billion federal dollars were funneled into School Improvement Grant (SIG) funds. The NCLB sanctions required schools to identify the lowest performing schools in the state and set aside federal dollars targeted to serve the lowest-performing schools.

My research suggests schools were rewarded with additional financial support in the form of School Improvement Grants and Race to The Top funds based on their failure to reach AYP. In laymen’s terms failure meant the receipt of more federal financial support and allocation of resources such as staff, programming, and extended school-day options for failing to make AYP and continuing to stay in School Improvement status.

On the backend, millions of dollars were being dispersed from local school districts for school choice as depicted in Table 4. While the state was reallocating federal funds from districts which failed to make AYP, they disseminated the funds on a per pupil basis to charter schools and private schools. The more schools a district had in failing school status and the deeper in School Improvement status a school was, the more federal and state funds received; and on the backside, the lower-performing the district was and the more schools in School Improvement Year 2 and beyond, the more funds were leaving the districts under the espoused value of school choice.

Districts found themselves applying for funds attached to competitive applications that required the school district to follow a prescriptive method of school turnaround
dictated by the federal government. Sanctions were part of the prescriptive method including school choice, supplemental tutoring, and reconstitution of staff which meant removing the principal or turning over management to an outside provider (see Appendix D). The funds to support the underperforming schools in the district through these prescriptive methods and sanctions were needed to make up for the loss of district dollars used to fund charter schools and private schools under the theme of school choice.

What is amazing about the situation and dilemma districts with heterogeneous student populations faced was that due to poverty, these school districts and or school buildings with over 40% poverty school-wide prior to NCLB would have received these dollars regardless of the academic status of the school. The NCLB sanctions prescribed federal funds to support charter schools, private school vouchers, and online schools with no brick and mortar.

Schools such as ECOT received over 112 million dollars from the state of Ohio local school districts yet graduated less than 40% of its students over 10 years according to Bush and Richards (2015). In Ohio, where schools and districts are rated by their performance index scores, 98 out of 100 of the lowest performing school districts are charter schools (Ohio Department of Education School Performance Index School Rankings, 2015). The two public school districts in the bottom one hundred are Dayton, of the Ohio Urban Big Eight, and Warrensville Heights in Cuyahoga County.

The goal of 100% of the students across the country reaching proficiencies in math and reading in buildings receiving federal Title I funds was not only unrealistic, it was a shell game. As Ravitch (2010) suggested, the most toxic flaw in NCLB was the command that 100% of the students be proficient in math and reading by 2014. When
NCLB was instituted in 2001 with specific sanctions for schools failing to reach AYP, it
established a system that was not only broken but was set up for failure.

In my opinion, the current system will de-regulate public education and place the
financial burden associated with federal sanctions on the local taxpayer. The cost of
NCLB sanctions will send funds traditionally designated for those students most at risk to
charter schools. These experimental charter schools are performing far worse than the
neighborhood schools the students formerly attended. The espoused value of choice has
actually provided an enacted value that takes from poor students and districts, and
provides even poorer performing schools as the choice for those students most in need of
additional supports.

**Leadership Implications**

According to Thompson (2008), “More has been written about leadership than
any other topic in organization science. Paradoxically, it is the least understood of
management topics” (p.176). Thompson (2008) went on to suggest that presidents,
heroes, and consultants all have ideas or something to say about leadership. Thompson
(2008) defined leadership as “the ability to influence people to achieve an organization or
group’s goals” (p.176). Alston and McClellan (2011) suggested leadership involves
influence, process, and goal attainment.

This research study was designed to explore the perceptions of urban school
principals on NCLB sanctions after successfully turning around a low-performing school.
Both research participants in this qualitative case study were able to establish processes
influencing others to reach organizational and building goals. These principals can be
defined as leaders if the definitions of leadership as listed by the researchers in the
paragraph above are used. What can be learned from each of these principals’ unique experiences to impact policy actors, legislatures, instructional leaders, and school districts becomes the question.

Implications for School Districts

As federal dollars are increasingly being used by urban districts to support public school choice, a major sanction of the NCLB policy associated with districts and schools failing to make adequate yearly progress, leadership decisions become pivotal to sustain the public educational system. According to Maxwell (2014), for the first time, the overall number of Latino, African-American, and Asian students in public K-12 classrooms is expected to surpass the number of non-Hispanic whites. The new collective majority of minority school children is projected to be 50.3% according to the National Center for Education Statistics (p. 1). Darling-Hammond (2007) suggested that 50 years after Brown v. Board of Education, the United States has become accustomed to educational inequalities and our educational achievement gaps are still large. The educational inequalities are exacerbated when examining the geographic locations of minority students. Darling-Hammond (2007) addressed this in her studies by finding that African American and Hispanic students are concentrated in central city public schools. Many become majority “minority.” Today 69% of the largest 100 school districts consist of predominately minority students according to Sable and Hoffman (as cited in Darling-Hammond, 2007, p. 320).

Minority students and urban school districts are being affected by sanctions and funding school choice options most readily. These statistics present an alarming problem regarding funding, staffing, and closing achievement gaps with decreasing enrollment,
fewer federal dollars, and students leaving for charters and private schools. In Ohio all of the Big Eight Urban Districts are predominately minority (see Table 1) (Ohio Department of Education Local Report Card, 2013). District leadership teams need to be strategic in assessing the staffing, leadership, and instructional practices at the schools in greatest need and level of school improvement status.

My suggestion for district leadership begins with each district leadership team utilizing interviewing protocols which assess the belief systems and self-efficacy of instructional leaders placed at the schools identified as low performing. Both principals in this qualitative case study expressed a desire to serve the students, communities, and staffs of their respective schools. They were able to unite instructional teams based on relationship building, securing the schools, and providing safe learning environments modeling what they expected. Each of these principals worked longer hours, started their days earlier, and went beyond contracted obligations to move their schools.

It is far easier to prevent than to rectify. Hiring principals with a high degree of self-efficacy, servant leadership mindsets, and the unique ability to influence others to believe in the process is essential. Each principal in this study used evidence-based processes that made common sense to move their schools. Both principals used the DuFour et al. (2010) critical questions as a standard process for standardization.

According to Prolman (2016), providing clarity of expectations and “no secrets” enhances leadership credibility. Once the instructional staffs were aware of the instructional processes the building leadership expected, clarity was established.

Each principal spoke of resistance to standardization by some staff members. Union representatives and groups of teachers expressed that teaching to tests limits
creativity, instructional freedom, and are short-sighted techniques. Yet, each of these principals was able to move their schools from the school improvement list and sanctions associated with failing to make AYP. Each of the principal leaders increased the number of students meeting grade level expectations on the Ohio Achievement Test by over 10% in three or fewer years. Each principal moved their respective schools from a D rating on the Ohio Achievement Performance Index to a B rating. While resistance was noted, the ability to increase the students’ achievement as measured by the OAA increased the staff member’s confidence in the process.

While the principal leadership in each of the schools studied exhibited high degrees of self-efficacy, each also possessed a high degree of spirituality and sense of purpose. Dishonesty and cheating to reach state test goals can undermine even the greatest intentions if the urgency of focus is on testing or saving a school through quick fixes to increase student test performance as opposed to serving students. One of Ohio’s Big Eight Urban school district’s offered incentives for increased test scores and provided monetary benefits to schools and principals who demonstrated exceptional growth. An investigation by the Cleveland Plain Dealer discovered the district as well as others in Ohio had scrubbed or tossed out the test scores of low-performing students (Ravitch, 2010, p. 157).

The Atlanta Public Schools cheating scandal is one of the largest examples of corruption within a district focused on increasing student achievement by any means necessary. Atlanta Superintendent Beverly Hall was honored as the American Association of School Administrators National Superintendent of the Year in 2009 (Ravitch, 2010, p. 165). Yet, cheating scandals erupted in Atlanta, Washington DC, and
other districts. According to Ravitch (2013), the Atlanta cheating scandal eventually resulted in the indictment of Superintendent Hall and 34 other educators.

**Leadership Implication for Principal Training Programs**

The Ohio Department of Education utilizes the Ohio Principal Evaluation Process hereto referred as (OPES). The evaluation system contains five standards which include continuous improvement, instruction, collaboration, parent and community engagement, and learning environment. These components are then broken down into four or five subcategories under each of the five standards. This study has suggested to me that a vetting process should be established to determine principal candidates fit for the instructional leadership environment of our urban schools.

My suggestions for the principal leadership programs are simply put in the phrase, “be with someone who wants to be with you.” Each principal in this study was able to unite the majority of their staff using relationship-building and affirmations at one building through a process of identifying quick wins. The other principal united the majority of his staff by establishing a safe learning environment and establishing order in the school to protect both staff and students. Both of these principals were willing to go into the community to establish relationships, build confidence with parents, and find ways to connect with the students.

During principal leadership training, the courses rarely require a community service component. Principal leadership training programs require field experience hours and working under principals to complete specific projects based on certification requirements. My suggestion would incorporate a community service component. This community service component would include a mandate that principal candidates
establish relationships with local organizations, churches, businesses, community members, and local institutions prior to starting a field experience placement. I would make this recommendation to all Human Resource departments in urban school districts as well.

My research has suggested it is critical that principals understand the culture, artifacts, history, and community expectations prior to a placement in our urban schools. Thompson (2008) said culture is the unique values, norms, and shared beliefs of a social group. Thompson went on to note that only one-ninth of culture can be seen visibly; the rest is submerged which requires getting to the beliefs and values of a community. Our most vulnerable population of students often faced undesirable circumstances associated with their economic conditions. My research suggests they need principal leaders who want to serve, not to save them. If the principal does not know the community and or have a vested interest, they have very little incentive to stay. My research findings imply to me that the principal leaders used for this research not only valued the communities they served in, but also knew the community members, business owners, and traditions of the community surrounding their schools.

Far too often individuals are hired for positions based on credentials, yet have very little vested interest in the communities they serve. By incorporating a community connections component principal training programs could demonstrate to the candidates the foundational work required to transform schools. It takes the entire village to raise one child. Human Resources departments could potentially save time, effort, and money by vetting the individuals who do not fit the need of the community or believe in serving
wherever the Lord places them, as Mona stated. Mona and Henry’s belief of serving first and view of education as a calling versus a career served them both well.

In addition, the suggestion for urban school districts with regard to leadership implications for principal training and hiring would include an assurance that community members are part of the vetting process prior to hiring principal candidates. Community members often have a vested interest in the neighborhoods and institutions that are part of the community culture surrounding their schools. While in urban communities with high poverty and or high unemployment, there is a perception of decay and lack of resources; each community has assets which may not be visible to the school district. If urban school districts are serious about increasing the performance of their students, they will need to ensure the community members are viewed as assets.

**Recommendations**

The title and the topic of this study were chosen because although there are studies that address urban principals and the perceived impact of change in principal leadership (Ishimaru, 2013; Myers, 2012; Terosky, 2014) and the abundance of research on NCLB and the accountability movement (Darling-Hammond et al., 2014; Muhammad, 2009; Ravitch, 2013), there is limited research on the perspective of NCLB sanctions from the lens of principals who have successfully turned around a failing school. Nor is there much research on the principals’ perceptions of the NCLB sanctions’ impact on the communities they serve once the transformation has occurred.

The research and findings from this study suggest to me there are systemic processes in place at the federal and state level that will have negative implications for
the institution called public education as the demographics of our urban school districts becoming increasingly more diverse and students of color become the majority.

“Today 69% of the largest 100 school districts are made up of predominately minority students,” according to Sable and Hoffman (as cited in Darling-Hammond, 2007). I am afraid the most vulnerable students will find themselves isolated and even more segregated with decreased amounts of federal and or state resources available to support their needs. I base this on the amount of federal dollars currently being sent to local school districts under ESEA funds better known as Title I funds. These dollars already do not cover the costs associated with sustaining public school choice via charter schools (see Table 4).

In addition, our urban school districts which are heavily impacted by NCLB sanctions are increasingly more segregated (see Table 1). As opposed to providing choices for low-income students and minority students, Orfield (2014) stated, “What we’ve seen over the past two decades is a slow but steady increase in the isolation of Black and Latino students; there is double segregation of race and poverty” (as cited in Long, 2014, p. 31). With the dismal performance of charter schools in the state of Ohio and the vast amount of federal dollars and now local dollars needed to sustain school choice, where do children of color find the quality education needed to obtain their individual goals?

The recommendations I list are based on my results from the principal participants, my questionnaire analysis, and findings along with my own personal experiences with turning around low-performing schools. These recommendations are designed for policy actors, state legislators, teachers, local school boards, educators,
school administrators, and any institution or individual concerned with the well-being of our most vulnerable population—children. My intent with these recommendations is to inform, yet they may offend. My intent with these recommendations is to provide solutions to the problems faced in our public educational institutions brought on by the espoused values of leaving no child behind.

My first recommendation is to start with the end in mind. Public schools, private schools, and charter schools have a central goal of graduating students prepared to function in the world and in 2017 a global economy. My recommendation is that urban school districts from elementary level through high school start by partnering with entrepreneurs, local colleges, businesses, churches, city government officials, social service agencies, hospitals, and community institutions to expose our students to a lens outside of their neighborhoods. Exposure changes expectations.

When students do not see themselves in the curriculum and or understand the importance of education, many struggle to connect the learning in class to the larger society and become disinterested. In addition, each of the various institutions has a vested interest in the success of our public school system. These institutions are part of the culture of the community and students as well as individuals must learn to synthesize information. By partnering with a diverse group of institutions our students can gain a rich, descriptive approach to learning from various community stakeholders. Connecting teachers, principals, and schools to the community is critical for support of public education which is facing a huge image problem based on the inability of districts to reach the unrealistic goal of 100% of students being proficient by 2014.
The possibilities are endless through job shadowing, internships, group-sponsored parent events, job fairs, career days, community gardens, on-campus projects, college campus visits with parents and students, teacher- or administrator-for-a-day programs, problem-solving activities, real-world problem solving and, what I believe, is the most critical component—the chance for our youth to learn from their elders and the elders to learn from the youth. The community partnerships should be strategic and not organic along with being based on the individual community’s assets and student needs. I believe these community partnerships will increase the accountability of entire instructional staffs in urban communities as teachers and staffs develop a vested interest in the communities due to the collective efforts of the institutions.

As a teacher, instead of teaching to a test, it is important to teach to standards and or grade-level expectations. These standards afford students the opportunity to function in the larger society and within their communities. It would push principals and teachers to recognize that teaching to standards is not teaching to a test, but is teaching to grade-level expectations that are required for the children to be able to navigate in a global economy not learning in silos.

In the book of 1Corinthians 12:11(KJV) it is stated, “For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of the one body, being many are one.” I recommend that to sustain the public school system as known today our private, public, and charter schools must find a way to work together collectively. The federal dollars associated with ESEA or NCLB and now ESSA will become increasingly smaller for public schools as they are dispersed among charter schools and private schools under the voucher movement. This will place an unprecedented burden on local taxpayer dollars to
make up for the shortfalls currently manifesting themselves in our Big Eight Urban districts.

While private schools can select students they want to attend and charter schools can place criteria in place to select students as well, public schools are not at liberty to select based on any criteria other than address, zip code, and place of residence. Yet, our public school students are floating among all three of these institutions under the espoused values of school choice. With the increase in blended learning and online classes at the collegiate level and the K-12 level, working to provide access for students to participate in all three venues may produce a billing conundrum, but it would provide various groups choice without breaking the local taxpayer dollar base and disseminating funds across all three institutions. Currently it is a one-way street, meaning federal dollars come into the public school system and then are dispersed out to the charter and private schools. The collaboration would provide for access for public school students and private school students to continue to stay in their schools yet take courses at a sister private or public school online or on weekends. Sharing resources could include facilities, staffing resources, access to teams, professional development, technology resources, and a different lens for each institution which currently has pitted the three against each other for various reasons, one of which is dwindling funds.

**Suggestions for Future Research**

In concluding my research on (NCLB) sanctions’ impact on urban schools from the perceptions of school principals who have successfully turned around a low-performing school, I am still highly interested in how the new Every Student Succeed Act (Klein, 2017) also known as ESSA will change the landscape for local, state, and federal
public education. With this in mind, a recommendation for future research would be to increase the sample size population. Future research could include increasing the number of principals looking at multiple urban districts across Ohio, not just the Big Eight districts. Although this research included questionnaires with representatives across multiple school districts including four Ohio Big Eight Urban districts to triangulate the data (see Appendix E), the research participants for this study represented only two of the Ohio Big Eight. The state of Ohio has six additional urban districts in the Big Eight which have seen declining enrollment and loss of financial resources to support school choice, which is one of the sanctions associated with NCLB.

In addition, the principals chosen for this research were located within a 25-mile radius of the researcher. A recommendation for further research would be to gain the perspective of urban school principals who successfully turned around low-performing schools who live outside of the 25 miles and extend the radius to 100 miles. This would provide a narrative on the circumstances other large city districts are facing with regard to school choice, turning around low-performing schools and financial implications to the cities and districts in other areas.

A second recommendation for future research could include looking at a variety of grade levels to gain differing perspectives. Each of the principals in this study served at the elementary level. It might be of interest for future researchers to look at the perceptions of high school and middle-school principals who successfully turned around low-performing schools to see if similar themes emerge. After concluding the research, I began to think about my experiences as a principal at all three grade levels. The leadership required to unify staffs under a common theme or vision at the elementary,
middle, and high school levels at each of my former schools was not the same depending on the age of the students, the teachers’ perceptions and parents’ needs.

The servant educator mentality expressed by both principals might look quite different at other instructional levels. One of the themes that emerged from the research was both principals were able to unify their staffs during the turnaround process. One principal used affirmations, quick wins, and voice and choice. Henry was able to unite his staff through a feeling of safety for students and staff. Both expressed their position was to serve and not to save. As a result, I would recommend future researchers look at the perspective of principals across multiple grade levels. This may provide a different perspective on the savior versus servant educator or leader theme that emerged from this research.

Another recommendation for future studies would be to look at the impact of the new Every Student Succeed Act (ESSA) policy on public education from the perspective of the superintendent. Superintendents are responsible for running multi-million dollar operations. The superintendent and local school boards are required to ensure compliance with federal and state academic regulations. In addition, they must also address the academic, economic, and culture and climate concerns of the district.

With progressive declines in enrollment in Ohio Big Eight Urban districts as well as a steady decrease in federal dollars available to assist with the implementation of school choice, the perceptions of superintendents in urban school districts on the impact of NCLB sanctions would provide for an intense and interesting case study. The superintendent’s lens or perspective is truly unique because although a person in that
position does not directly impact students, that person is responsible for hiring principal leaders who do.

The superintendent’s perspective on the building leadership to the financial impact on staffing, hiring, and reductions in force due to enrollment declines might prove quite different from our research participants’ viewpoint. Where a person sits determines what is seen. As a government official responsible for implementing and complying with federal, state, and local educational laws and policy, the superintendent’s perceptions or perspective could provide an in-depth analysis of the impact of federal policy on local districts, as well as a view of the organizational hierarchy and the bureaucracy associated with implementing federal policy while using state and local taxpayer dollars to support such policies.

Other suggested future research includes looking at how each subgroup in urban schools’ academic performance will be measured. How will subgroup sizes be determined at the state level? A suggestion would be to look at the financial implications for urban school districts in areas with high concentrations of Emerging English Language Learners. Southern states and western states have high concentrations of Hispanic students where English is their second language. Each of these students is expected to meet the same academic standards on state tests as students who speak English fluently. It would be interesting to study how ESSA might change the former federally-prescribed sanctions in schools and districts that continue to not meet the state academic expectations with all students, especially financially or with school choice and voucher options.
In addition, other suggestions for future research are centered on the question of what education in the United States is designed to produce and for whom it was established. If federal and state public education systems were designed to prepare all American citizens to function in a democratic society, then future research suggestions include researching demographics of America when the system was established and comparing it to the current population of students who are being served in urban school districts in major metropolitan areas now. My research has suggested, based on my findings, future researchers may want to look deeper into the individuals and institutions that design educational policy and how they are financed.

The institutions and organizational structures embedded in them are designed to sustain these organizations and institutions. As the color of America changes and the future of America falls into the hands of the next generation of students, how will their success be measured, how will success as a country be measured? A standardized test for all students in each state to demonstrate proficiency may not be the measure of success being sought. Interestingly enough, each of the participants in this study was able to make dramatic increases on state tests and neither one is still in the school where these changes occurred. Each has moved on to the next challenge and the schools are often left to a new administrator with limited knowledge of the past practices or connections in the community to serve the students adequately.

My final suggestion for future researchers can be summed up into the following statement, “If you are not sitting at the table, you often end up on the plate” (personal communication). A qualitative case study or even quantitative study on the diversity or lack thereof on the content of the state assessments and the curriculum taught to students.
across America may provide a critical piece in understanding achievement gaps. It could also provide future researchers the means to close these achievement gaps by incorporating a curriculum based on state standards, yet incorporating content designed to reach the increasingly diverse students served in this nation of immigrants.
References


Haberman, M. (2003). Who benefits from failed urban school districts? The Institute for Minority Affairs University of Wisconsin, MI.


Appendix A

Ohio Performance Index Definition

The Performance Index (PI) Score measures the achievement of every student regardless of his or her level of proficiency. Schools receive points for every level of achievement, with more points being awarded for higher passing scores. Untested students also are included in the calculation and schools and districts receive zero points for them. For the purposes of assigning the letter grades, a PI Score of 120 is considered to be a "perfect" score. Districts and schools will receive one of five letter grades from "A" through "F" based on the percentage of total possible points earned.

Seventy five percent of the district letter grade comes from the Performance Index score: the level of achievement for each student on each state test. The possible levels are Advanced, Accelerated, Proficient, Basic and Limited. Schools and districts receive points for every student’s level of achievement. Each level is weighted from 1.3 to 0.3 points.

In order to have a Performance Index Score calculated, a school or district must have at least ten (10) accountable students taking one or more assessments. In cases where a school or district has fewer than ten unique students across all tested grades who have taken assessments, the data will be masked and the Performance Index Letter Grade will not be calculated.

Source:
Appendix B

Survey Questions for Principals Interview One and Questionnaire Participants

1. Do you agree with NCLB reform sanctions for underperforming schools?

2. Has removing the principal from a low-performing school been an effective strategy under NCLB sanctions?

3. Has reconstituting the staffs of low-performing buildings been an effective strategy under NCLB?

4. In your opinion has allowing students the choice to attend other schools in the district as a result of attending a low-performing school been an effective NCLB strategy?

5. Has closing schools and re-opening them as charter schools been an effective strategy under NCLB?

6. NCLB sanctions redirect state funds from public schools to for profit and nonprofit charter schools along with private schools to what extent do you agree or disagree with this strategy?

7. Ohio offers Educational Choice Vouchers for students in low-performing schools to attend private schools as a school choice option do your agree or disagree with this strategy?

8. NCLB sanctions have enhanced the educational experiences of the staff and students in our community to what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement.
Appendix C

Principal Research Participant Questions Semi Structured Interview 2

1. Did you feel you were there to serve the students or to save the school as the leader?
2. What were the experiences leading to you becoming a principal at the school?
3. What were the demographics of the student and parent population at your school?
4. Describe the neighborhood surrounding your school?
5. Explain the strategies you used to turn around your school?
6. Explain the strategies you used to turn around your school?
7. How was your school community affected by NCLB sanctions?
8. Are there any of the NCLB sanctions you agree with if so explain?
9. What suggestions would you have for improving student achievement for legislators who design policy so they can close achievement gaps?
Appendix D

No Child Left Behind Sanctions Chart

Consecutive Years of Missing AYP Sanctions

First Year Placed on “watch” list
Required to develop a school improvement plan

Second Year Listed as “needs improvement” school.
District must provide any student attending the “needs improvement” school the option of attending another school that has met adequate yearly progress. The district pays transportation costs.

Third Year Listed as “needs improvement” school.
District must provide any student attending the “needs improvement” school the option of attending another school that has met adequate yearly progress. The district pays transportation costs.
The school district must offer “supplemental educational services” to any student who qualifies for free or reduced lunch. One option for supplemental services must be from an outside provider.

Fourth Year Listed as “needs improvement” school.
District must provide any student attending the “needs improvement” school the option of attending another school that has met adequate yearly progress. The district pays transportation costs.
The school district must offer “supplemental educational services” to any student who qualifies for free or reduced lunch. One option for supplemental services must be from an outside provider.
The school must change its staffing or make a “fundamental change” such as restructuring the school.

Fifth Year Listed as “needs improvement” school.
District must provide any student attending the “needs improvement” school the option of attending another school that has met adequate yearly progress. The district pays transportation costs.
The school district must offer “supplemental educational services” to any student who qualifies for free or reduced lunch. One option for supplemental services must be from an outside provider.
The school must convert into a charter school, turn management over to a private management company or be taken over by the state.

Source:
### Appendix E

**Participant Demographics**

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<th>Gender</th>
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<td>Urban</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>18+</td>
<td>CHUH</td>
<td>Principal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>Charter</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>9-12 years</td>
<td>Ohio Connections</td>
<td>Principal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-racial</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>18+</td>
<td>Canton City</td>
<td>Principal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>4-8 years</td>
<td>Polk</td>
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</tr>
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<td>CHUH</td>
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</tr>
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<td>18+</td>
<td>Ed. Services Center</td>
<td>Director</td>
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<tr>
<td>White</td>
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<td>Male</td>
<td>18+</td>
<td>Canton City</td>
<td>Board of Educ.</td>
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<td>Canton City</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
</tr>
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<td>Urban</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>13-18</td>
<td>Canton City</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Female</td>
<td>18+</td>
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<td>Jackson</td>
<td>Court Staff</td>
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<td>4-8 years</td>
<td>Canton City</td>
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<tr>
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<td>18+</td>
<td>Orrville</td>
<td>Parent</td>
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<tr>
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<td>13-18</td>
<td>Plain Local</td>
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<td>18+</td>
<td>Columbus</td>
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<td>9-12 years</td>
<td>Portland OR</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
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<td>Other</td>
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<td>13-18</td>
<td>State of Ohio</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
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</table>

| Multi-racial    | Urban                | Female | 13-18               | Akron Public    | Teacher         |
| African American| Urban                | Female | 4-8 years           | Akron Public    | Teacher         |
| African American| Urban                | Female | 9-12 years          | Sandusky        | Principal       |
| African American| Urban                | Male   | 13-18 years         | PGCPS           | Teacher         |
| African American| Urban                | Male   | 18+                 | Canton City     | School Admin    |
| African American| Urban                | Male   | 13-18 years         | Cleveland State | Higher Ed. Admin|
| White           | Urban                | Male   | 18+                 | Alliance City   | Central Office  |
| African American| Suburban/Urban       | Male   | 18+                 | CHUH            | School Admin    |