SCHOOL LEADERSHIP AND STRATEGIC PLANNING:
THE IMPACT ON LOCAL REPORT CARD RATINGS

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ABSTRACT

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The Elementary Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965, reauthorized as No Child Left Behind (NCLB), increased accountability measures in public schools across the nation. One component of NCLB dictated that school districts publicly report annual summative testing scores.

Noting that previous research has shown that school district leadership engaged in the strategic planning process increases student achievement, the State of Ohio formed the Ohio Leadership Advisory Council (OLAC). OLAC’s work embraced the use of leadership led strategic planning and thus wrote the Ohio Improvement Process (OIP) for use in all Ohio districts regardless of size, typology, leadership tenure, or average daily membership.

This quantitative causal-comparative study investigates the effect of OIP on Local Report Card (LRC) ratings in Ohio school districts. To determine if differences exist school district leadership responded to a survey that reported 2011-2012 LRC ratings and measured their respective stage of implementation and commitment to OIP.

Using responses from the 14-item research constructed survey, data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The findings from the research show that the impact of OIP on LRC is more complex than previously assumed. Contrary to researcher expectations, the use of OIP did not statistically impact LRC. Future research using Value Added or Performance Index Scores (both growth measures of the LRC) could potentially produce statistically significant results, as they are more specific in nature than the LRC ratings are.

Research Question 1 notes 94% of the survey respondents were school district central
office administrators with 65% being in their current position three or more years. Seventy-four percent of respondents have been their district point of contact or OIP facilitator.

Responses from Research Questions 2 and 3 three highlight LRC data were positively significantly skewed. This created the foundation for running inferential test using both the parametric ANOVA and non-parametric Kruskal-Wallis. When data between LRC and OIP were analyzed using categories – “Not Started”, “Stalled”, “Started” and “Completed” – statistical significance was reported, with the “Not Started” group scoring higher on the LRC than both the “Stalled” and “Completed” groups. When data were regrouped and the same categories were analyzed within the stages of OIP, no significance was noted. When data were grouped via specific stage of the OIP, no significance was noted.

Via descriptive data (based on respondents’ reported opinions), Research Question 4 prodigiously highlighted the importance of using OIP as a strategic planning framework to: 1) Promote school district leadership collaboration; 2) Engage central office administration; 3) Assist a school district in introducing new educational initiatives; and 4) Increase student progress and achievement. Increasing progress and achievement was the ultimate goal of the Ohio Leadership Advisory written Ohio Improvement Process.

The implications for school leaders and future research were also discussed. Noting that LRC ratings as a whole may not be sensitive enough to discover statistical significance of OIP on LRC, future study would suggest a researcher use the Performance Index (PI) or Value Added (VA) scores as the dependent variable. Both the PI and VA scores are publicly shared with Ohio stakeholders as they are two of the four components that make up the overall LRC rating.

The study offers a solid foundation for future research while sharing respondent’s perceptions regarding the implementation of strategic planning, namely The OIP.
DEDICATION

This dissertation is lovingly dedicated to my Grandma, Erma Iree Littler Skillings.

Grandma Skillings was not only my Grandma but my first grade teacher at Pitchin Elementary School in Pitchin, Ohio. Her love and guidance as a Grandma and teacher continue to be a part of who I am today. At the age of six when my life was shattered, she was there to help pick up the pieces. Her love and encouragement cited that all things are possible. She made all the difference in my life as a Grandma, “Mom”, teacher, role model, and life-mentor.

My academic career began in a first grade classroom with Grandma and it is only fitting that my terminal degree ends with a heartfelt dedication of appreciation and admiration to her, the best Grandma and first grade teacher I could have ever had. She is one of the reasons my life is what it is today. I am so blessed and thankful to have had her as my Grandma.

Grandma, I miss you very much but know you are with me every day! Please know the example you set for me has influenced every day of my life. I love you! Love always, Susie

To: Susie
From: Grandma Skillings
(As written in Susie’s third grade autograph book)

So little by little the oak tree grows,
So little by little I’ll try to know.
And someday soon you’ll see.
The world will be better for me.

* * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * *

And to the road – I am thankful God made you a part of my life!

My time with you has taught me the meaning of commitment.
With you I have experienced physical and spiritual growth and felt the joy of accomplishment.
We have dealt with pain, injury, and recovery.

The sights, the sounds, and the sense of freedom along the way have been amazing.
My “running” friendships and relationships have impacted my life in extraordinary ways.
I have discovered that within every mile, I will never win, but that I am a winner.

I look forward to spending more time with you!

Thank you: Mike, Jeff, Dick, Kathleen, Doug, Dave, Chriss, Tim, Lisa, Chris, Gary, Terry, Don, Bill, McKenzie Louise, Shelby Girl, Bo, and Boiler Boy. We had so many GREAT runs and wonderful times! $n = 56$ marathons + $n = 5$ Boston Marathons = Awesome!!
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I am similarly grateful for the love and encouragement of Charles E. Mallinson aka: Brownie 😊. You have been supportive and understanding of my long work hours for Norwalk City Schools (the school district to which I have dedicated 35 years) and of my work at BGSU while I completed a lifelong dream of a doctoral degree. Your support and reassurances have been unwavering. I appreciate and love you very much.

To the finest Dad (Kenneth Skillings), remarkable Uncle (David Skillings), and caring
Grandma and Grandpa (Lewis and Erma Skillings), each of you in your own way has given so much to my life. There are not sufficient words. Thank you for your love, support, and an ethical compass. Not a day goes by that I don’t miss each of you. It took a village but we made it.

And to Aunt Marilyn and Uncle Gene Farrell, thank you for your continued care, support, and unending words of encouragement. You make holidays and family time so special. I love and appreciate you both.

To Mom, you gave me life. Yes, things between us were not typical but no matter - biology connects people. Friendship is good. Life is too short.

To the Caudills (Mom and Mr. C.), the Shirleys (Bob, Pat, and Steve), and the Hoars (Susie, Debbie, and family), and Aunt Mary Jo: I would be remiss not to acknowledge the love, friendships, and guidance you provided at different intersections of my life. Thank you.

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And most of all I acknowledge and give thanks to God. I know You are there. I can’t thank You enough for carrying me when I have needed You the most. Know I appreciate Your unconditional love and blessings. With You, I realize all things are possible.

P.S. To Stephanie Hanna, my secretary and Mark White, Technology Director at Willard City Schools – I could not have completed this work without your technology assistance in the data collection phase!! I was at my “limit” and your help meant more than I can say. THANK YOU.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Background of the Study</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Genesis of School Accountability</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased Accountability in Ohio</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Leadership and Student Achievement</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ohio’s Approach to Increased Accountability – The Ohio Improvement Process</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem Statement</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose of the Study</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance of the Study</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations of the Study</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition of Terms</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background of the Problem</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational Reform</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership and Accountability</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Ohio Improvement Process</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Types of Educational Leadership</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collective Leadership</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Shared Leadership ................................................................. 42
Distributed Leadership .......................................................... 43
Instructional Leadership .......................................................... 46
District-Level Leadership .......................................................... 48
Facets of District Leadership ......................................................... 48
District-Level Leadership .......................................................... 53
Educational Leaders ................................................................. 57
The Role of the Superintendent .................................................. 57
Superintendent and Non-negotiable Goals .................................. 60
Principals .................................................................................. 63
Teachers .................................................................................. 66
School Leadership and Student Achievement ............................ 67
Accountability and Assessing Leadership Effects ....................... 68
Research on the Impact of Leadership on Achievement .............. 71
Conclusion ............................................................................... 79

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY ......................................................... 82
Purpose and Overview of the Study ......................................... 82
Research Design ....................................................................... 82
Participants ............................................................................. 83
Instrumentation ........................................................................ 84
Procedures ............................................................................. 87
Research Questions ................................................................. 90
Data Analysis ........................................................................... 90
Summary ............................................................................................................ 92

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS.......................................................................................... 94
Introduction ............................................................................................................ 94

Descriptive Statistics ...................................................................................... 94
Research Question 1 ...................................................................................... 98
Research Question 2 ...................................................................................... 100
Research Question 3 ...................................................................................... 104
Research Question 4 ...................................................................................... 105
Ancillary Analysis ......................................................................................... 107

Summary ............................................................................................................ 108

CHAPTER V: SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION ....................................................... 110
Introduction ............................................................................................................ 110

Review of the Study................................................................................................... 110
Discussion ............................................................................................................ 112

Leadership Matters............................................................................................ 113
Achievement Matters .......................................................................................... 114
Research Question 1: Implementation of the OIP ........................................... 115
Research Questions 2 and 3: Making Sense of Unexpected Results .............. 116
Research Question 4: Valuing the Process ....................................................... 119

Discussion of Other Findings............................................................................. 120

General Conclusions .......................................................................................... 124

Recommendations and Implications for Educators ........................................... 126

Suggestions for Additional Research ................................................................. 127
Conclusion ............................................................................................................ 129
REFERENCES ...................................................................................................................... 130
APPENDIX A. BOWLING GREEN STATE UNIVERSITY – HSRB ............................... 143
APPENDIX B. SURVEY COVER LETTER ................................................................. 145
APPENDIX C. OIPIS SURVEY ................................................................................ 147
APPENDIX D. OIP DIAGRAM ...................................................................................... 152
APPENDIX E. UNDERSTANDING OHIO SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY .................. 153
### LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Research Questions, Variables, Data Analysis Techniques</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Frequencies and Percentages for Research Participant Job Titles</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Frequencies and Percentages for Length of Employment in Current Position</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Frequencies and Percentages for Service as District Point of Contact for OIP</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Frequencies and Percentages of District Typology as Reported by Respondents</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>School District Typologies as Reported by ODE</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Frequencies and Percentages – School District Report Card Ratings</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Frequencies and Percentages – OIP Implementation Stage</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Frequencies and Percentages – Year OIP Began</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Frequencies and Percentages – OIP Commitment</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Descriptive Statistics – LRC Ratings Group 1</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Descriptive Statistics – LRC Ratings Group 2</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Assess Differences on LRC by Degree of Implementation</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Frequencies and Percentages Survey Items 9 – 12</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Research Questions and Bulleted Results</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Antecedents of Excellence</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Histogram of Report Card Ratings (2011-2012)</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>District Leadership Reflections</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Across our nation attention is heightened to the crucial role and effect of school leadership on the success of our schools and their academic programs. Leaders take people to places they have never been before (Kouzes & Posner, 2007). The work of school leaders is becoming more meaningful, more exciting, and above all more central to the success of education systems in our country (Fullan, 2011). School administrators play a vital role in setting the vision and mission for their districts and its stakeholders. Research has found a statistically significant relationship between district leadership and student achievement (Waters & Marzano, 2006). District leaders must adopt a proactive stance that ensures certain uniform behaviors occur in every school and in every classroom (Marzano & Waters, 2009). The fundamental purpose of effective accountability systems is not the rating, ranking, evaluating, sorting, and humiliating of students, schools, teachers, and leaders. The fundamental purpose of effective accountability systems is the improvement of teaching and learning (Reeves, 2009). The cost of leadership diffusion is high and the rewards of leadership are great (Reeves, 2011). It will take a collaborative effort and widely dispersed leadership to meet the challenges confronting our schools, and virtually everyone who has elected to enter the field of education has the potential to lead (DuFour & Marzano, 2011).

Raising achievement is important because it matters for individuals and society. If you achieve at a higher level, you live longer, are healthier, and earn more money. For those with only a high school diploma, the standard of living in the United States is lower (Williams, 2007). People who earn more money and pay more taxes, are less likely to depend on Medicaid or welfare, and are less likely to be in prison. It has been calculated that if the high school dropout would stay to graduate, the benefit to society would be $209,000 (Levin,
Belfield, Muenning & Rouse, 2007). Economist Eric Hanushek (2004) has calculated that if each student’s achievement is raised one standard deviation, over 30 years, the economy would grow by 10%.

When understanding the impact and importance of achievement on the economy and well-being of our country, it is paramount to raise student achievement. To successfully raise student achievement, we must improve the quality of those who educate our students. Specifically, we must work to improve the educators we already have through relentlessly focusing on the things that we do than can improve achievement (William, 2007). Leadership led strategic planning that contains collaborative goal setting, non-negotiable goals for instruction, board alignment and support of academic goals, monitoring goals for achievement and instruction, and using resources to support achievement and instruction via leadership led strategic planning can be an end to the means to realize increased achievement (Waters & Marzano, 2006).

Leadership led strategic planning and setting a vision in an organization is about building a framework of greatness (Collins 2005). To achieve greatness the mission and vision of an organization must be clear and understood by constituents. School superintendents must set clear, non-negotiable goals for learning and instruction, yet provide leadership teams with responsibility and authority for determining how to meet these goals (Waters & Marzano, 2006). Organizations must expend enormous amounts of organizational energy clarifying and simplifying priorities and resist any pursuit that could detract from them (Buckingham, 2005; Collins 2005; Reeves 2010). To protect the core of an organization, leaders must work diligently to “filter” what comes into their organization that seduces employees away from the core (Schmoker, 2011).
Leadership matters. And today, more than ever the stakes to improve student performance are high. It is imperative that educational leaders are equipped with the knowledge and skills they need to meet the challenge (OhioLeadership.org). Embracing current research for educational best practices, the Ohio Leadership Advisory Council (OLAC) was created to examine how a leadership “system” for educators could be developed that reaches from top to bottom across all levels. This system, which includes superintendents, principals, and teachers, would affect every level of Ohio’s educational enterprise – from the state, to the district, to the school building and classroom (OhioLeadership.org). From its initial meeting, held March 19, 2007, the Ohio Leadership Advisory Council (OLAC) recognized that its charge had to be addressed from a systems’ perspective and that their work required a rethinking of what is meant by leadership (ODE, 2008). Throughout the Council’s debate and discussions, members focused on the firm belief that traditional models of leadership residing in a person or persons must be replaced with a new shared leadership among many individuals at various levels throughout a school system (ODE 2008). An assumption underlying all of Ohio’s work was to create a coherent and cohesive leadership development system whereby the purpose of leadership was grounded in the foundation to improve instructional practice and performance, regardless of role (Elmore, 2006). “Leadership” for the Ohio Leadership Advisory Council was based on the belief that all educators have the capacity to lead and essential leadership practices must be implemented by adults at all levels for improvement in student performance to be made. A collaborative effort and widely dispersed leadership is essential to meet the challenges confronting schools (DuFour & Marzano, 2011). Leadership impacts student progress and achievement (Waters & Marzano, 2006).
Redefining leadership as a set of shared practices moves the conversation regarding school leadership from personal attributes or character traits of an individual to a conversation about adults at every level of the system/organization and what they can do together to continually improve instructional practice and hold each other accountable for improved student learning on a district-wide basis (OLAC Update, 2009). There is an urgent need for collective leadership, and a statewide response for effectively addressing that need must be developed now. Ohio’s leadership system must be anchored in teaching and learning, focused on building community and directed to ensuring the success of all children (Ohio Leadership Agenda, n.d.). Ohio’s support system and strategy to guide this work is called The Ohio Improvement Process (OIP).

**Background of Study**

**The Genesis of School Accountability**

How can current research impact the future without an understanding of the past? William Pinar (2007) uses the terms “vertically” and “horizontally” to describe the historical look at a discipline as well as its present circumstances (pp. xiii-xiv). “Acknowledging the discipline-specific historical context in which one’s topic becomes intelligible is one marker of disciplinarity (Pinar, 2007). Therefore, it is necessary to share an overview of the genesis of school accountability across time from the mid-1960s to the present day to fully understand where we find ourselves with school accountability as we know it today.

During the Presidency of Lyndon Baines Johnson in 1964, the federal government passed the Elementary Secondary Education Act (ESEA) as a part of the president’s “War on Poverty”. ESEA, the most expansive federal education legislation in history, was an extensive statute to fund primary and secondary education while explicitly forbidding the
establishment of a national curriculum (Hoover Institution). ESEA contained legislation to improve academic achievement of disadvantaged students, prepare, train, and recruit high quality teachers and administrators, provide heightened instructional practices for Limited English Proficient students, look towards 21st Century educational initiatives, and promote informed school choice and innovative school programs with attention to equal access and high standards of accountability.

Nineteen years after the Elementary Secondary Education Act called for educational accountability, President Ronald Regan shared with the American people a body of work from The National Commission on Excellence in Education, titled, “A Nation at Risk”. This report noted dismal results and outcomes via ESEA and found academic performance at most levels continued to be poor (A Nation at Risk, 1983). Once again, limited educational progress served as a catalyst for our nation and its people to re-examine the foundations and expectations of our educational systems. As a part of “A Nation at Risk”, The National Commission on Excellence in Education shared additional recommendations for the United States’ educational system to move forward with proficiency. Yet in 1998, 15 years after A Nation at Risk was published and additional recommendations were made via a National Education Goals Panel and the Educate America Act, the following was stated, “Unfortunately, the economic boon times have made many Americans indifferent to poor educational achievement. Too many express indifference, apathy, a shrug of the shoulders, despite continuing indicators of educational inadequacy, and the risk this poses for our future well-being” (Bennett, Fair, Finn, Flake, Hirsch, Marshall, & Ravitch, 1998). The state of the education system across America continued to be challenged.
During the Presidency of George H. W. Bush the federal government formed a National Education Goal’s Panel. In 1990 the Goals Panel published a list of eight overarching objectives to build a “Nation of Learners”. After the Presidency of George H. W. Bush ended, the bipartisan unmet educational objectives of the National Education Goals Panel were passed to President William J. Clinton and 103rd Congress who reintroduced the educational objectives as Goals 2000: The Educate America Act. The Educate America Act stated its foundation was to:

1. Improve learning by providing a national framework for education reform,
2. Promote the research, consensus building, and systemic changes needed,
3. Ensure equitable education opportunities and high educational achievement for all,
4. Provide a framework for reauthorizing of all Federal education programs, and
5. Promote the development and adoption of a voluntary national system of skills, standards, certifications, and other purposes. (Educate America Act, 1994)

Three years after his introduction of the Educate America Act, President Clinton, in his State of the Union Address on February 4, 1997, challenged the nation to a national crusade for educational standards developed by the Nation. He clarified his words by saying this meant national standards and not federal government school standards. The President promised to help schools meet these standards and measure their progress via national tests of student achievement in math and reading. The President again prodded educational systems towards a national standards-based instructional format with testing to prove student competency. Upon President Clinton’s departure from office the state of the educational system in the United States would be handed to the 43rd President, George W. Bush.
In 2002 under the guidance of President George W. Bush, Congress would again reauthorize and return to the foundations of the bipartisan Elementary Secondary Education Act of 1965, renaming the Act, No Child Left Behind (NCLB). NCLB unlike its educational predecessors added documented benchmarks to ensure systemic educational change. Notably, states were mandated to test students in reading and math in grades three to eight and once again during their high school years. Achievement gaps were to be closed among all students regardless of poverty level, race, ethnicity, disabilities, or English language skills. All children were to have fair, equal, and significant opportunities to obtain a high quality kindergarten to grade 12 education (NCLB, 2002). Every state in the Union would be required to have academic content standards and develop a summative testing process to ensure accountability for teaching and learning. The accountability requirement would guarantee each student was making Adequately Yearly Progress (AYP), a growth measure of individual students. More than its predecessor ESEA of 1965, No Child Left Behind 2002 stated goals and objectives that must be embraced by all publically funded school systems in order to continue to receive federal dollars for education. NCLB mandated school districts report testing outcomes publically each school year. NCLB 2001, adopted on January 3, 2002, would have a profound effect on educational systems in Ohio and beyond as legislators and educators looked ahead to the 100% academic proficiency requirements of NCLB for all students by the end of academic school year 2013-2014. As legislated by the federal government, Ohio began sharing Local Report Card (LRC) ratings with all constituents to meet the foundations of No Child Left Behind.
Increased Accountability in Ohio

To proactively promote educational best practices and academic growth in all students as noted in NCLB, in 2006, the Ohio State Board of Education asked Achieve Incorporated, a bi-partisan, non-profit organization to evaluate and benchmark Ohio’s kindergarten to grade 12 policies and practices against best-in-class international standards (Achieve 2006). With full cooperation of the Ohio Department of Education, Achieve Incorporated then enlisted additional help from McKinsey and Company, an international management and consulting firm with domestic and international experience in the education sector, to aid in researching the characteristics of high-performing systems (Achieve, 2006). The culmination of the Achieve-McKinsey statewide evaluation/review, funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, produced a document titled *Creating a World-Class Education System in Ohio*. The evaluation/review was an updated starting point for a new forward-looking conversation among Ohio leaders about what it would take for Ohio to achieve the goal of creating a world-class educational system (Achieve, 2006).

Achieve Incorporated along with McKinsey and Company, although impressed with recent educational reforms in Ohio, presented the state with three key factors for successful school organizations. These were:

1. High challenge for student achievement and those responsible for student achievement including superintendents, principals, teachers, and the students themselves,

2. High support to provide the necessary resources and build capabilities of those previously mentioned to ensure they can meet high expectations of student achievement,
3. Aligned incentives which include positive motivations and negative consequences for meeting or failing to meet expectations of student achievement. (Achieve, 2006)

Benchmarking Ohio’s kindergarten to grade 12 system against the characteristics of globally recognized high performing systems further produced a set of seven key implications for the State of Ohio. These were:

1. Ensure readiness for college and the global economy by continuing to raise Ohio’s Standards and improve assessments.
2. Empower principals to function as instructional leaders.
3. Align clear expectations for teachers with evaluation, professional development and consequences.
4. Motivate and holistically support students to meet high expectations addressing unique needs.
5. Ensure that funding is fairly allocated and linked to accountability.
6. Increase effectiveness of school and district ratings and interventions.
7. Provide all students with access to high-quality, publically funded school options.

(Achieve, 2006)

For the Ohio Department of Education and the State Legislature of Ohio, the question became how to address the three key factors and the seven key implications of Creating a World-Class Education System in Ohio in a systematic format for Ohio’s 600 plus public school districts serving 1.8 million students in over 4,000 kindergarten to grade 12 buildings across the state.
Achieve and McKinsey made their recommendations clear. In spite of steady improvement in recent years, Ohio’s performance was falling far short of what was necessary if future citizens of the state were to compete successfully in the global economy. There was a broad consensus among Ohio’s educational leaders regarding the need to build on educational achievements and address the lingering challenges if Ohio’s educational system was to be brought to the next level. Transforming Ohio’s schools to graduate globally competitive students would require leaders to develop a systematic, holistic view of school reform – one that questions many practices that are business-as-usual in American education (Achieve 2006). Embracing the seven implications of *Creating a World-Class Education System in Ohio* and to further address the impending mandates of NCLB, the State of Ohio in 2007, brought together a team of constituents from across Ohio to be known as the Ohio Leadership Advisory Council (OLAC). After in-depth research and collaboration this council developed a strategic system’s framework titled: The Ohio Improvement Process (OIP). The OIP would facilitate academic and educational stakeholder involvement driven by school leaders and educational best practices.

**School Leadership and Student Achievement**

In 2003 the Wallace Foundation, a national philanthropic organization based in New York City, commissioned a study at the Stanford School of Education to investigate innovative principal professional development programs. The central goal of the study was to note exemplary leadership programs that were instructionally focused and not management based in application. Participants in the Wallace Foundation Studies examined literature regarding leadership development in exemplary programs, conducted expert interviews in the field of educational leadership, reviewed criteria for pre- and in-service programs, conducted
principal and teacher surveys, and participated in extensive on-site school visits. Information compiled from this work led the researchers to eight exemplary programs for leadership study. All eight programs shared a strong focus on the necessity of instructional leadership for school administrators. The focus on instructional leadership in the exemplary programs demonstrated a strong foundation not just built on theory and principles but built on how to steep aspiring principals in experiences that would foster teaching and learning (Wallace Foundation, 2003). Results from the eight programs showed school administrators strongly focused on leading staff while improving academic instruction. The participants used a variety of instructional leadership practices which included the facilitation of student learning, fostering professional development, building professional learning communities (PLCs), working with teachers to improve practices, and using data to monitor progress and propose solutions to problems. Throughout this study the qualitative work consistently supported the premise that strong instructional leaders have the ability to impact student achievement. The starting point is to recognize that the inherent character traits said to make good leaders are much less amendable to influence by education, training, and practice than are knowledge and skill. The primary focus of leadership should be to guide instructional improvement, with everything else being secondary (Elmore, 2004).

The importance of leadership preparation and practice can further be validated by the study of Byrd, Slater, and Brooks via the Wallace Foundation (2003). Their work showed a connection between the quality of education obtained by school superintendents in educational administration programs with regards to leadership and school effectiveness as measured by student achievement. Their work highlighted the necessity of the school administrator to be an expert in effective instructional strategies, to observe and assist staff
with teaching when necessary, and to be the instructional decision maker when it comes to analyzing school data to increase progress and achievement. Their work concludes that leadership capabilities do make a difference in the testing success of students.

As recently as 2010 authors Honig, Copland, Rainey, Lorton, and Newton substantiate what has been learned from literature reviewed and reported in Wallace Foundation research. They noted the 1970s saw a wealth of information regarding the failure of schools but with no real system to make and monitor change. The 1980s saw effective school programs that were sometimes hit and miss with no real data to show how and why leadership could impact achievement. However, by the 1990s school reform measures were noting the effect from the central office and school leadership (McBeath, n.d.).

In recent years authors Waters and Marzano (2006) have extensively examined the effects of leadership efficacy on student achievement. The purpose of their meta-analysis study was to assess and prove if a positive correlation between school district leadership and student achievement existed. Their study included 27 works dating back to 1970. The studies utilized involved 2,817 school districts and the achievement scores of 3.4 million students. Results showed, although slight, a statistically significant relationship between district leadership and student achievement, demonstrating district leadership does matter and effective superintendents (district leaders) should focus efforts on creating goal oriented districts.

Marzano and Waters’ meta-analysis cited the following: Differences in achievement among schools are not just reflections of the characteristics of the students who attend them, but also the efforts of the professionals within the schools. Although helpful, effective schools’ first generation findings lacked specificity for practitioners to distinguish positive
and ineffective practices (Waters & Marzano, 2006). However, as the years passed into the 1980s more and more data was presented for analysis that explicitly described effective practice and how to compute the effect or strength of relationship on student achievement. Now with the third generation of effective schools’ data, applications clearly state well defined leadership practices that will create positive classroom climates and increased student achievement (Waters & Marzano, 2006).

Marzano and Waters continued their work and shared the results of a second study on instructional leadership in 2009 affirming: A reported correlation between district leadership, or district leadership variables, and student achievement and a standardized measure of student achievement or some index based on a standardized measure of student achievement. 2,714 school districts were involved as well as 4,500 superintendents in this meta-analysis. Although a variety of methodologies were involved, the studies examined surveyed superintendents and their perceptions of district-wide variables. In some districts the superintendent’s perceptions were combined with those of board members, school level administrators, and/or teachers. Marzano and Waters reaffirmed there was a statistical significance in the relationship of student achievement and school leadership. If student achievement and leadership practices were at the 50th percentile and the leadership practices improved one standard deviation and the .24 significance was applied as the correlate to student achievement, the average student achievement in a district would rise to 59.5%. Statistically expressed a .24 correlation is not a great deal of statistical significance. However, to increase student achievement by 9.5 percentage points based on heightened leadership practices is a substantial gain in achievement (Marzano & Waters, 2009).
Data and studies validate the impact of school leaders on student progress and achievement. The role of district administration is being highlighted as a place to begin to make change for academic impact. Differences in achievement among schools are not just a reflection of the characteristics of the students that attend them, but also of the efforts of the professionals within those schools (Waters & Marzano, 2006). The vision of the future and that which you wish to accomplish is much like a literary or musical theme. It is the broad message you want to convey, it is the primary melody that you want people to remember (Kouzes & Posner, 2007). Success begins with positive leadership. Leadership is about transforming values into action, visions into reality, obstacles into innovations, separateness into solidarity, and risks into rewards. Leadership creates a climate in which people turn challenging opportunities into remarkable success (Kouzes & Posner, 2007). Improvement, then, is change with direction, sustained over time that moves entire systems, raising the average level of quality and performance while decreasing the variation among units and engaging people in analysis and understanding of why some actions work and others don’t (Elmore, 2004).

Clearly, teaching and learning improvements at a single school or in multiple schools depends not only on what happens in schools but on how school district offices create and implement supports for change (Honig, Copland, Rainey, Lorton, & Newton, 2010). The reason we are all here together is we have the same unyielding desire to make sure all children are successful. This can happen in a civilized community in which people treat each other respectfully (McBeath, n.d.). Relationships and the emphasis on partnerships move beyond the argument of who should be in charge of educational improvement efforts. Both the school leadership and the central office leadership possess skills and opportunities to expand student
learning and achievement. School district administrators can exercise essential leadership, in partnership with school leaders, to build capacity throughout the public educational system for teaching and learning improvements (Honig, Copland, Rainey, Lorton, & Newton, 2010). All reform must focus on improvements to meaningful teaching and learning to improve student achievement.

Data collection for the Honig et al. study involved observations, interviews, and document reviews collected by a team of researchers during the 2007–2008 school year. Repeated visits to the school sites were supplemented by participant’s on-site visits during the data collection period. 282 interviews with 162 respondents were conducted. As with previously reviewed literature commonalities similar to what has already been stated exist: Promising building leadership practices can be identified, identifying promising activities by leadership as a whole impacts student achievement, stewardship activities to promote transformation can be identified, and it is necessary to identify prevalent and important practices throughout the school district to impact change.

Ohio’s Approach to Increased Accountability - The Ohio Improvement Process

In 2000, due to heightened federal accountability measures, the State of Ohio committed to building a standards-based educational system for its students, teachers, administrators, and stakeholders. This standards-based system would embrace a framework for a coherent, aligned system to improve the quality of education across Ohio. Although proud of its standards-based advances with the implementation of NCLB, Ohio also knew that a critical challenge remained: To ensure that those leading schools, regardless of role, had essential knowledge and skills to do their jobs – and do them well.
Thus in 2007 Ohio brought together the Ohio Leadership Advisory Council (OLAC) comprised of school superintendents, principals, teachers, organization officials, university faculty, Ohio Department of Education (ODE) officials, and policy makers, to address a unified approach to increasing leadership potential of school district administrators and teachers thereby increasing student progress and achievement as reported on each district’s publically distributed Local Report Card (LRC) as mandated by No Child Left Behind in 2002. The Ohio Leadership Advisory Council divided their work into three distinct phases. Notably, phase I focused on the identification and essential leadership practices needed to improve instructional practice and student performance (OLAC, 2008).

OLAC specifically identified Essential Leadership Practices in six major areas outlining what school superintendents, district level teams (DLT), and building level teams (BLT) must do to improve instructional practice and increase student performance. The six areas as noted by OLAC are:

1. Data and the Decision Making
2. Focused Goal Setting
3. Instruction and the Learning
4. Community Engagement
5. Resource Management, and

These essential leadership practices are critical elements of a comprehensive system of professional development for superintendents and district leadership teams. The essential practices include a variety of tools, services, and products the Ohio Department of Education
in partnership with districts will use to assist superintendents and leadership teams in improving instructional practice and student performance (Johnson, 2008).

Distributing (sharing) leadership functions through the development of district and building leadership teams is essential. A leadership function directed by one individual to a team of professionals is the focus (ODE, 2008). Enhancing the skills and knowledge of the people in the organization, creating a common culture of expectations around the use of skills and knowledge, holding various pieces of the organization together in a productive relationship with each other, and holding individuals accountable for their contributions to the collective results (Elmore, 2004) would promote a culture of expectation and commitment while maintaining a district-wide focus on progress and achievement for all students. To achieve the latter OLAC introduced the Ohio Improvement Process (OIP), a structured process based on the use of a connected set of tools for ensuring a systematic and coherent approach for building all districts’ and schools’ capacity in real and meaningful ways across Ohio (Lloyd, McNulty, & Telfer, 2009). District Level Teams (DLTs) comprised of administrators, teacher leaders, board members, and community representatives would facilitate a transition to a new role for district leadership (ODE, 2008) via the Ohio Improvement Process. Shared leadership functions for the District Level Team via OIP would include tasks such as setting performance targets aligned with Board-adopted district goals: Monitoring performance against targets; building a foundation for data-driven decision making on a system-wide basis; designing system planning and focused improvement strategies, structures, and processes; facilitating the development and use of collaborative structure; brokering or facilitating high-quality professional development consistent with district goals for instruction and achievement; and allocating system resources towards
instructional improvement (ODE, 2008). A common dialogue embracing a mutual vision of success would align and redefine practices of greatest importance for increased and continued success. Leaders would employ a philosophy to create an understandable vision for all constituents (Waters & Marzano, 2006). Leadership would clarify and define the school district (Fullan, 2011).

The state system of support developed through the OIP provides power in its potential to provide information and data at all levels of the system based on district defined needs. The role of the superintendent in this process cannot be understated; he/she sets the stage for expectation for staff participation in the process by his/her presence, interest, and level of commitment to support the work (OhioLeadership.org.). OIP would be a clearly defined process with sophisticated tools that align to each other; would be connected in a web-based environment, reduce the potential for error; and allow districts and schools to plan the use of state and federal funds to implement a focused improvement plan (OhioLeadership.org.).

Under Ohio’s differentiated accountability model, approved by the United States Department of Education in July 2008, the OIP may be used as a required intervention to meet NCLB requirements. For districts in improvement status, the OIP removed the requirement that districts spend their time in corrective action/restructuring activities that are not related to their problems, while giving them time and tools to review their data and make informed decisions. For such districts, the OIP is required to the traditional NCLB sanctions (OhioLeadership.org.). Districts that are not in improvement status are not required to implement OIP, nor are they required to use OIP tools, such as the Decision Framework or the Implementation Management Monitoring tool (IMM).
Simply stated, the use of OIP is mandated for Ohio public school districts having District Report Card ratings of Academic Watch or Academic Emergency. School districts rated Excellent with Distinction, Excellent, Effective or Continuous Improvement on district report cards have the option of deploying the OIP leadership led strategic framework unless the district is receiving Federal/State Race to The Top (RtTT) dollars. Districts receiving RtTT dollars are mandated to participate regardless of district ranking. (Note: When federal Race to the Top funds became available to the state governments, a condition the Ohio Department of Education mandated was full participation in the OIP by any Ohio district that was to receive RtTT funds. RtTT came after the initial OIP implementation guidelines in place of NCLB sanctions legislated for Ohio.)

This research is a causal-comparative study that explores assumptions regarding the effect of leadership led strategic planning via the Ohio Improvement Process on Local Report Card ratings in Ohio school districts.

**Problem Statement**

Educational reform is upon us. There is no longer an option to weakly approach the impact of school district leadership on student progress and achievement. The Ohio Improvement Process provides Ohio school districts with the capability to demystify the antecedents of successful leadership through leader-lead systematic strategic planning. Identification of educational leaders in districts and schools is critical to improvement efforts. Specific non-negotiable goals identified by district leadership must align with state performance objectives. Shared district leadership from the superintendent to the classroom teacher plays a significant role in articulating goals for sustainable improvements in student’s learning and achievement.
Dr. Ted Zigler (2009), from the Ohio Department of Education reports that about 300 of the state’s 600+ school districts have started the school improvement process called OIP. Yet through data collection it is not known if the work of the Ohio Improvement Process has continued in school districts after the introduction phases or if districts’ work has stalled after the implementation of initial stages of the OIP process. When implemented with fidelity, the OIP process brings district leadership together to dissect all functions of the school system’s operations by a District Leadership Team (DLT). The intent of the OIP is to heighten leadership capabilities of district stakeholders and engage a DLT to lead district decision-making processes. Further unknown is the perceived benefit of the Ohio Improvement Process by school district leaders.

District goal-setting efforts via participation in the implementation stages of the Ohio Improvement Process (OIP) are currently unknown in Ohio school districts. School district leadership with higher Local Report Card (LRC) ratings may implement the OIP strategic planning framework with greater fidelity than districts scoring on the lower end of the LRC ratings. School districts with higher rankings may feel they have a “pass” on embedded OIP strategic planning due to state test scores that are well received by their constituents. School districts may have previously been engaged in other strategic planning frame works creating less fidelity of implementation when deploying OIP whether on a mandated or voluntary basis. To know and understand where school districts fall in the OIP process in comparison to LRC ratings is informative and useful to school district and state school leadership. This research, a quantitative causal-comparative study, explored differences in Local Report Card ratings of Ohio’s responding public school districts in relationship to their stage of
implementation of the Ohio Improvement Process, a strategic planning process led by school
district leadership.

**Purpose of the Study**

The objective of this research is to examine the similarities and differences of Local Report Card ratings of Ohio schools as compared to the stage of implementation of the Ohio Improvement Process. With a proliferation of research documenting that school district leadership makes an impact on student progress and achievement, the present research was to highlight, examine, and generate a statistical comparison of Local Report Card ratings (dependent variable) and Ohio school districts’ stage of implementation in the strategic planning framework the Ohio Improvement Process (independent variable) in Ohio’s diverse public school systems whether rural, small city, urban or suburban. Data for the study were gathered using a researcher constructed, electronically deployed, 14-item survey titled Ohio Improvement Process Involvement Survey (OIPIS) sent to Ohio’s 613 public school district superintendents or superintendent designated district leadership for response and insight.

**Research Questions**

The proposed study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the degree of Ohio’s public school district’s implementation of the Ohio Improvement Process?
2. Do Local Report Card Ratings differ by level of commitment to the Ohio Improvement Process?
3. Do Local Report Card ratings differ by the degree of implementation of the Ohio Improvement Process?
4. To what degree do Ohio school district superintendents value the Ohio Improvement Process?

**Significance of Study**

Positive school leadership is essential for student success. The Ohio Improvement Process, a relatively new strategic planning framework initiative set forth by the Ohio Department of Education, highlights and systematically guides stakeholders to unearth and employ best educational and leadership practices to increase student progress and achievement. Although the OIP is universally adaptable, there is limited research regarding the degree of implementation of the OIP in Ohio’s diverse public school systems. The impact of OIP has not yet been compared to legislated annually published district report card ratings to determine the effect of the strategic planning process. The variation in stage of implementation of the OIP in Ohio public school systems needs to be further documented to draw conclusions regarding the impact created in Ohio’s six Local Report Card (LRC) rating categories.

This study may reveal increased student academic success as reported via LRCs with school leadership engagement in the implementation of the Ohio Improvement Process. There is a potential for awareness and heightened use of the OIP if positive correlation findings are presented between leadership and achievement. The importance of school district leadership and their stakeholder shared engagement in focused strategic planning may be verified. The foundations and perceived outcomes of the Ohio Improvement Process as set forth by the Ohio Leadership Advisory Council may be confirmed. School district constituents will have data showing OLACs essential practices may help to encourage
increased leadership engagements resulting in heightened results per student progress and achievement as documented via Local Report Card ratings.

Research demonstrates that positive leadership collaboration makes a difference at all levels in a school organization (Honig, Copland, Rainey, Lorton & Newton, 2010). The willingness to articulate fundamental goals, the strategies for achieving those goals and the indicators that will be used to monitor progress towards the goals are vital to effective school leadership (DuFour & Marzano, 2011). Once understood and employed, the OIP process will highlight schools that are “leading” and not just “lucky” in their approach to sustain progress and achievement (see Figure 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Achievement of Results (effect)</th>
<th>Lucky</th>
<th>Leading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High results, low understanding of antecedents – replication of success is unlikely</td>
<td>High results, high understanding of antecedents – replication of success likely</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Losing</td>
<td>Low results, low understanding – replication of failure likely</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning</td>
<td>Low results, high understanding of antecedents – replication of success unlikely</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Antecedents of Excellence (cause)

*Figure 1. L2 Matrix: Antecedents of Excellence – Leadership Framework, Reeves (2006).*

Foundations for replicating success may be documented, implemented, and tweaked year after year. Implementation of the OIP may offer even the highest performing districts a structured approach to begin to collaboratively explore effect data and link it with its cause(s) (Lloyd, McNulty, & Telfer, 2009). District leadership, teachers, and students will benefit when replicating the antecedents of success as unearthed through the Ohio Improvement
Process via shared leadership practices and increased student achievement. This research provided data demonstrating the impact of the Ohio Improvement Process on Local District Report Card ratings which may provide foundational validity for implementing and continuing the strategic planning process, OIP.

**Limitations of the Study**

This study solicited the stage of participation in the Ohio Improvement Process of responding Ohio public school systems via their superintendents or a superintendent’s designee answering an electronic survey questionnaire. The survey questions were validated by OIP experts from local Educational Service Centers (ESC) and State Support Teams (SST). Limitations may be inherent as these folks may have a stronger foundation and knowledge of the OIP. The questionnaire possesses a limited scope for respondents to elucidate their responses and provide additional thoughts and insight. Although limited, the amount of survey detail requested adequately answered the study’s research questions.

Superintendent and superintendent designees solicited to answer the questionnaire have a wide mix of experience, personal perspective, and view of strategic planning which may impact results. The use of a questionnaire has inherent limitations due to the lack of detail respondents may share. There is no guarantee of a response from all Ohio public school districts, thus creating a limitation. The foundation, understanding, and participation of district leadership in the Ohio Improvement Process within respective districts may create a limitation as their foundation of knowledge regarding the OIP may differ. Participation in the Ohio Improvement Process may be dependent on the superintendent’s leadership style, and/or the reliance of an external facilitator to lead the process. As previously mentioned, participation in OIP may be limited if districts were previously engaged in other strategic
planning processes such as Effective Schools, Baldridge Leadership Training, or on-site
district developed strategic plans. This study relied on self-reporting of district involvement
in the OIP via the district superintendent or superintendent’s designee. Differences in school
district’s infrastructure regarding how one should lead, the depth of leadership talent in the
district, and the leadership capabilities of participants may impact the study data. Personal
belief systems of district leaders may limit the degree of participation in the OIP process or
the study survey. Honest answers by all respondents are assumed.

The researcher cannot be sure other educational initiatives or changes within school
districts did not impact the data reported for school year 2011-2012. There is limited
generalizability as participants were conveniently and not randomly selected. All districts
surveyed are located in the State of Ohio. Thus, results are not generalizable to states other
than Ohio unless they too have a similar state-wide strategic planning process.

Some survey questions may be omitted by the respondents. The researcher, due to the
nature of the study, will not resubmit surveys where omissions appear. The research did not
discriminate district data based on district size, LRC rating, OIP involvement, or district
leadership tenure unless superintendents or designees have been with the district less than one
year. Some results may be skewed as districts with newly assigned leadership will not be
included in the data research. Limitations also include the realization that all surveys may not
be returned due to a compression of time issues with district leadership and/or districts
personal approach to surveys of information.

Also of note is the weakness of a survey to understand insight of respondents as it
relates to the causes and processes of implementing the Ohio Improvement Process (IV)
framework with fidelity since implementation is being measured against the dependent variable, Local Report Card ratings.

**Definition of Terms**

The following vocabulary was defined to promote foundational knowledge of key-terms essential to this study.


*Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)*. Adequate Yearly Progress is one of the cornerstones of the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA 1964) signed into law as the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act in January 2002. NCLB requires states to develop a baseline or starting point for students to achieve proficiency as measured by state assessments for reading and math. Each year states must “raise the AYP bar” in gradual increments so that by school year 2013-2014, all (100%) students will achieve proficiency in each subject area. The goal for schools and districts is to meet or exceed the annual objective or to make progress over the previous year (State of Washington, Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction).

*Achieve, Inc.* A bi-partisan non-profit organization located in Washington D.C. created by the nation’s governors and business leaders in 1996 to help states raise academic standards, improve assessments, and strengthen accountability to prepare all young people for post-secondary work, education, and citizenship (Achieve, 2006).
*Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA).* ESEA is a United States federal statute enacted on April 11, 1965. The ESEA statute was passed as a part of President Lyndon B. Johnson’s “War on Poverty” and is the most far-reaching federal legislation affecting education ever passed by the United States Congress. ESEA emphasizes equal access to education and establishes high standards and accountability while diminishing achievement gaps between students by providing each child with a fair and equal opportunity to achieve an exceptional education. ESEA was reauthorized in 2002 under the George W. Bush presidency as No Child Left Behind (NCLB).

*Leadership.* As defined in the Ohio Leadership Advisory Council framework: Leadership is based on the belief that all educators have the capacity to lead and essential leadership practices must be implemented by adults at all levels of the educational system for improvement in student performance (OLAC, 2008).

*Local Report Card (LRC).* A document published for all public school districts and individual school buildings using multiple measures to evaluate performance. Ratings are computed using State Indicators, a Performance Index, and Adequate Yearly Progress and Value Added data. Ohio’s district ratings are: Excellent with Distinction, Excellent, Effective, Continuous Improvement, Academic Watch and Academic Emergency.

*McKinsey and Company.* Founded in 1926, an international management consulting firm with a continuous goal to help clients make distinctive, lasting, and substantial improvements in performance.

*No Child Left Behind (NCLB).* No Child Left Behind is the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 passed under the George W. Bush administration in 2002 representing legislation that attempts to accomplish Standards Based
Educational reform. No Child Left Behind reauthorized federal programs meant to hold primary and secondary schools measurably accountable to higher standards for all students with 100% success by the end of year 2013-2014.

*Ohio Improvement Process (OIP).* A leadership development framework outlining a common core of essential practices around which systematic efforts to improve leadership – at the state, regional, and local levels – can be unified and advanced. The four stage process provides structure for aligning processes, tools, and people to significantly improve instructional practice and student performance. The Ohio Improvement Process stages are:

1. Identifying Critical Needs
2. Developing a Focused Plan
3. Implement and Monitor the Focused Plan and
4. Evaluate the Improvement Process. (OLAC, 2008)

*Ohio Leadership Advisory Council (OLAC).* A distinguished group of 50 leaders from all regions of Ohio, representing a variety of roles, disciplines, and points of view – to identify essential leadership practices needed by superintendents, principals, and leadership teams at district and building levels to improve instructional practice and student performance, co-sponsored and co-directed by the Ohio Department of Education and the Buckeye Association of School Administrators. (OLAC, 2008)

*State Indicators.* For Ohio’s Accountability System, indicators represent the areas of testing where all students tested on state assessments meet or exceed the goal of 75% proficiency in reading at grades 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 10, in math at grades 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 10, in science in grades 5, 8, and 10, and in writing at grade 10. In grade 11 all students must meet or exceed the goal of 85% proficiency in reading, math, science, social studies and
writing for indicators to be earned. Additionally, an indicator is earned by each Ohio school district if they meet or exceed a 90% graduation rate or meet or exceed an attendance rate of 93%. Currently the State of Ohio has 26 indicators. These criteria are mandated by federal law in No Child Left Behind (Ohio Department of Education).

War on Poverty. The War on Poverty was an ambitious governmental effort to address the problem of persistent poverty in the United States. The War on Poverty defined a new era of American liberalism and added new layers to the American Welfare state. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act was introduced as an important measure to combat the War on Poverty in 1965 during the Presidency of Lyndon B. Johnson.
CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This study considers the impact of a statewide program embarked on by the Ohio Department of Education to develop standards and programming designed to support school improvement and increase student achievement in schools across the state. This chapter presents the literature review that serves as the context for framing the research questions exploring the effectiveness of this initiative. The review begins with a look at the background of the problem starting with the movement toward educational reform (Barker, 2008; Jackson & Lunenburg, 2010; MacBeath, 2008; Maleyko, 2011; Togneri & Anderson, 2003) through leadership and accountability (Budge, 2010; Burch, 2007; Crum, 2009; Lloyd, McNulty & Telfer, 2009; Volante & Cherubini, 2010; Wahlstrom, Louis, Leithwood & Anderson, 2010; Wang, Beckett & Brown, 2006). Also explained is the role of the Ohio Leadership Advisory Council’s (OLAC) work in devising non-negotiable goals for school improvement efforts (Lloyd et al., 2009; Ohio Improvement Process, 2010; Ohio’s Leadership Development Framework, 2008; Reagle, 2006; Togneri & Anderson, 2003; Townsend, 2010; van Lier, 2009). An overview of the initiative, the Ohio Improvement Process (OIP) is presented.

The topic of educational leadership is investigated (Bredeson & Kose, 2007; Chrispeels, Burke, Johnson & Daly, 2008; Corcoran, Fuhrman & Belcher, 2001; Firestone & Martinez, 2007; Leithwood, 2010; McKenzie & Scheurich, 2008; Park & Datnow, 2009; Ramalho, Garza & Merchant, 2010; Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008; Wahlstrom et al., 2010; Wohlstetter, Datnow & Park, 2008) and considered in terms of three categories of leadership that are frequently discussed in the literature in terms of educational leaders’ response to the mandates of federal and state policy. The research on collective leadership (Leithwood, Day,
Sammons, Harris & Hopkins, 2006; Miller & Rowan, 2006; Wahlstrom et al., 2010), shared leadership (Bligh, Pearce & Kohles, 2006; Louis, Wahlstrom, Michlin, Gordon, Thomas, Leithwood, & Moore, 2010; Marks & Nance, 2007; Thompson & Moffett, 2008; Wahlstrom et al., 2010) and distributed leadership (Angelle, 2010; Firestone & Martinez, 2007; Harris, 2007; Leithwood et al., 2006; Robinson, Lloyd & Rowe, 2009; Wahlstrom et al., 2010) is discussed. The work on instructional leadership is also reviewed for its relevance to this conversation (Burch, 2007; Bredeson & Kose, 2007; Chrispeels et al., 2008; Edge & Mylopoulos, 2008; Lashway et al., 2003; Wahlstrom et al., 2010).

The reform initiative of the OIP entails distinct aspects of district-level and school-level leadership and collaboration. Mechanisms for district-level planning and dialogue are discussed (Wahlstrom et al., 2010) and facets of district leadership are explored (Bredeson & Kose, 2007; Burch, 2007; Chrispeels et al., 2008; Corcoran et al., 2001; Hannay, Manning & Earl, 2006; Hannay, Manning, Earl & Blair, 2006; Leithwood, 2003, 2010; Palandra, 2010; Salazar, 2007; Togneri & Anderson, 2003; Wahlstrom et al., 2010; Waters & Marzano, 2006). The roles of stakeholders in the school district improvement effort are considered as well as the impact they may have on leadership for reform efforts (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson & Wahlstrom, 2004; Togneri & Anderson, 2003).

Identification of educational leaders in districts and schools is critical to improvement efforts as the literature discussed in this chapter demonstrates. Superintendents play a key role at all levels of the school improvement process (Bredeson & Kose, 2007; Leithwood et al., 2006; Murphy, Elliott, Goldring & Porter, 2007; Togneri & Anderson, 2003). Influential researchers have identified the importance of non-negotiable goals which school district’s must identify and align with state performance targets. The school district superintendent
plays a significant role in articulating and reinforcing these goals so that sustainable improvement can be realized; such goals are at the heart of the OIP (Ohio Leadership Advisory Council non-negotiables, n.d.; Waters & Marzano, 2006). Principals (Bligh et al., 2006; Chrispeels et al., 2008; Harris, Brown & Abbott, 2006; Jacobson, 2010; Lashway et al., 2003; Leithwood et al., 2006; Lyons & Algozzine, 2006; Togneri & Anderson, 2003; Torres, Zellner & Erlandson, 2008; Waters & Marzano, 2006) and teachers (Edge & Mylopoulos, 2008; Firestone & Martinez, 2007; Leithwood et al., 2006; Loeb, Elfers & Plecki, 2010; Wahlstrom et al., 2010) also serve as valuable leaders to school reform efforts and the literature acknowledges how these school-based players may have an impact on district-wide policy, planning, and implementation.

The last section of this review considers the literature on the relationship of school leadership to student achievement (Leithwood et al., 2006; Wahlstrom et al., 2010) and how accountability and efforts to assess leadership effects may be employed to inform and strengthen planning and programming work (Barker, 2008; Black, 2008; Budge, 2010; Burch, 2007; Chrispeels et al., 2008; Crum, 2009; Firestone & Shipps, 2005; Geijsel, Kruger & Sleegers, 2010; Jackson & Lunenburg, 2010; Marks & Nance, 2007; Lyons & Algozzine, 2006; MacBeath, 2008; Noonan & Renihan, 2006; Sloan, 2008; Suspitsyna, 2010; van Lier, 2009; Volante & Cherubini, 2010; Wang et al., 2006). The review concludes with a discussion of several recent studies exploring how leadership impacts student achievement (Hallinger & Heck, 2010; Jacobson, 2010; Leithwood et al., 2006; Robinson et al., 2009; Taylor, 2010; van Lier, 2009; Waters & Marzano, 2006). These studies provide an excellent background for and insight on Ohio’s efforts to improve school performance and raise student progress and achievement through a system-wide plan for reform.
Background of the Problem

Educational Reform

The emphasis on school reform and the drive toward academic accountability has created an environment in which individual schools/districts often appear to be pitted against one another. High performing “good” schools with high-achieving students who win awards and matriculate at rates above the national average are lauded, while low-performing “bad” schools are criticized as they struggle for survival in an educational climate that regards these schools as failing and therefore subject to loss of funding, takeover or closure. It may seem to be overstating the case by framing the discussion in such a Manichean aspect but there seems to be a urgent struggle between good and bad. The ongoing, fervid debate over how to improve student achievement and meet accountability standards has taken on some dualistic shading since the advent of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), the growth in popularity and the attendant scrutiny of charter schools, and the often politicized media coverage of the role and influence of teachers’ unions, to name but several developments over the last decade that have fundamentally shaped how we think about American education (Maleyko, 2011).

Educational researchers and practitioners, who may be less invested in the dramatic elements of this narrative and more focused on the pragmatics of educational delivery, have increasingly focused in on the question of how to extend school-based success on a wider and more sustainable level than just the individual successful school. While islands of excellence exist, individual school success may tell us something about good instructional practice and strategies for building student learning and achievement, district level success can be even more revelatory, highlighting leadership and reform approaches that may be replicated in other school systems across the country (MacBeath, 2008). While the success of an
individual school often reflects a series of advantageous circumstances including a wealth of resources and committed and well-compensated staff, entire school districts are more often marked by greater diversity and thus, improvement efforts that have impact across the system demonstrate the potential for broader application. Togneri and Anderson (2003) described this view as moving away from “isolated islands of excellence” (individual, successful schools) to “systems of success” that serve to close the achievement gap that exists between children from advantaged backgrounds and their peers in low-income communities and schools (p. 1), (also Barker, 2008; Jackson & Lunenburg, 2010).

**Leadership and Accountability**

Leadership entails two central purposes – the direction of focus and activity and the ability to persuade and influence. Wahlstrom, Louis, Leithwood and Anderson (2010) observed these two intentions may be carried out in different ways, accounting for the range of compelling leadership theories that continue to be explored by researchers and practitioners across disciplines and professions. Wahlstrom et al. further stated that, based on their own research, the leaders who “strike the proper balance between stability and change” are those who emphasize developing and supporting others in their efforts and who continually seek to improve the design of the organization to achieve these effects (p. 7).

No Child Left Behind requires states to identify support for schools that require assistance in order to meet federal and state standards of student performance as measured by standardized tests (Crum, 2009). Lloyd, McNulty and Telfer (2009) noted that in response to this federal guideline, most states have developed programs that specifically target low-performing schools, or that exclusively focus on an area of funding or programming. This exclusive focus on targeted “solutions” has produced a mixed bag of effects with school
districts expending a good deal of money, time, energy, and morale on trying out different, often inadequate, responses to struggling systems and then having to replace them with a new time-consuming system (Budge, 2010; Burch, 2007; Volante & Cherubini, 2010; Wang, Beckett & Brown, 2006).

Ohio illustrates the case of a state embarking on a statewide system of support for school improvement that is designed to be accessible to all schools and districts, regardless of their current level of performance. The emphasis in the Ohio plan is on district-based collective leadership that defines school improvement as the responsibility of every school stakeholder and thus, invites every school stakeholder into the leadership for improvement process. It is this shared interest in improvement and the recognition that all stakeholders are valuable contributors to school success that indicates the efficacy of a “common approach and focus across all programs/departments/offices within the district.” (Lloyd et al., 2009, p. 1).

Further, the Ohio Department of Education determined that this perspective entailed a paradigmatic shift in thinking about school systems as isolated from one another and reflective of the communities they served. Rather, it was determined that in order to achieve coherence in educational delivery and align service across the state with federal performance goals, it was critical to reduce or eliminate the possibility for educational directives to conflict with or nullify one another in order to ensure equity in support delivery, evaluative efforts, and the satisfaction of accountability standards.

The Ohio Improvement Process

The Ohio Improvement Process (OIP) is an effort initiated by the Ohio Department of Education to implement a unified approach to student achievement and school improvement across the state’s school districts. The Ohio Leadership Advisory Council (OLAC) was
established in 2007 and began the OIP by making recommendations toward collaborative or shared leadership at the district and school level as a necessary reform to replace traditional, hierarchical leadership models concentrating power and influence in a single executive, such as the superintendent or the school principal. Drawing on much of the empirical research highlighting the benefits of different forms of shared leadership, engaging various educational stakeholders in decision-making and reform efforts (Marzano 2006; Reagle, 2006; Stewart, 2006; Townsend, 2010), the OLAC outlined practices for building and supporting shared leadership. The district-level emphasis, within a statewide approach to school improvement, is a critical component of the OIP design. District cultures differ from one another, especially within a demographically heterogeneous state like Ohio, and for school reform efforts to succeed, it is necessary to understand and consider specific district practices and how these sit within state initiative constructs (Ohio Improvement Process, 2010).

Out of OLAC’s work came Ohio’s Leadership Development Framework which identified critical leadership practices for building leadership teams across all levels of the school district that targeted improvements in school instructional practice and student achievement (Ohio’s Leadership Development Framework, 2008). The framework set forth essential practices for superintendents, district leadership teams, and individual school leadership teams. OLAC observed the importance of providing district and school leaders with clear and achievable goals to guide assessment of efforts to achieve instructional and school effectiveness. To this end, the framework offers case study examples of how to usefully align the work of district central office staff with target performance goals and school support, how to interpret and apply district-wide data to support school improvement, how to shape collaborative learning structures to realize student achievement, and how to facilitate
strong, cooperative relationships among and between district and school leaders with the express intention of improving student learning.

Van Lier (2009) reported on a research effort undertaken by the nonprofit organization, Policy Matters Ohio, to assess the early stages of the OIP implementation. The organization interviewed 37 teachers and administrators drawn from 18 school districts that were participating in the OIP development and implementation in a pilot project that began in the 2007-2008 school year. Sixteen of the 18 Ohio districts surveyed were designated as Cohort One, having participated in the first level of the improvement effort. The 16 districts provided 24 of the study’s 37 total respondents. The remaining two districts represented large, urban populations and provided the other 13 subjects (teachers and administrators) surveyed. The two urban districts had been required to participate in the OIP due to their status as having schools with low performance that were subject to concentrated school improvement efforts. As van Lier noted, the 16 schools in Cohort One had voluntarily signed on for the OIP and received grants (albeit relatively small ones) to cover costs associated with this voluntary participation in the first stage of OIP development, whereas the two remaining urban districts were not receiving grant support and their participation in the OIP was not on a voluntary but required basis.

The survey of these OIP participants yielded some interesting and mixed results. Van Lier (2009) recounted that 70% of the Cohort One subjects reported that they had mostly positive experiences of the OIP. Some of the beneficial features they identified included a new and useful articulation of district objectives, the creation of focused district plans, efforts to engage various stakeholders with different concerns and expertise in the planning and improvement discussions, and greater collaboration and communication within schools and
across school districts. Participants cited the OIP as a much improved initiative over previous state education programs they had experienced. Some of the participating administrators and teachers approved of the OIP’s approach in encouraging districts to arrive at a set number of achievable non-negotiable goals and to devise strategies best-suited to their district and to individual schools for meeting those goals, rather than prior reform efforts these educators had experienced, outlining a wide array of issues that schools had to show they specifically addressed, regardless of whether individual issues had relevance to that particular school or district. Three of the Cohort One participants responded entirely in the negative to the OIP and van Lier noted that these were all union leaders who had not participated in the OIP development. This is a significant finding given other research discussed later in this chapter that suggests the benefits of engaging union representatives in district-level planning for improvement efforts (Togneri & Anderson, 2003).

The administrators and teachers included in the second non-voluntary cohort of schools in large, urban districts of Ohio reported more negative views of the OIP. While a few of the teachers and administrators in this second group identified aspects of the process they found promising or potentially useful, the vast majority of these subjects expressed disillusion in general with state improvement initiatives and were suspect of the OIP’s ability to fundamentally improve school performance and student achievement. Most of these individuals had experience with school improvement efforts in their districts over the years as authorities struggled to address economically challenged schools and communities with chronic low-performance. New mandates, changing responses, abandoned efforts, and enthusiasm over new programming that invariably failed to deliver on excessive promises of success, had over time served to foster a climate of frustration and skepticism about the ability
of new initiatives to address long-term problems. The schools in these two urban districts were largely left trying to integrate OIP plans and objectives with existing structures and the residue of previous improvement efforts that had eventually gone by the wayside.

For many of these participants in the second cohort, the efforts required to address the OIP framework were time-consuming and largely duplicated work that had already been done but now needed to be reframed according to OIP standards. While some of the second cohort leaders expressed outright resistance to the OIP implementation, others found some value in the focus. However, virtually all the participants reported “data fatigue” according to Van Lier’s (2009) accounting. Additionally, both cohorts reported the process to be extremely time-consuming. Those participants who saw value in the OIP structure were more willing to accept the commitment of time and resources while those who were more skeptical that benefits such as measurable improvements in instruction and student achievement would accrue were less likely to tolerate the additional demands on time; one deputy superintendent reported to van Lier that “it’s a long, pointless process for us to go through” (p. 6) since from her vantage point the district was already employing data to try and improve educational delivery to students.

Virtually all the participants in the Policy Matters research identified greater collaboration between teachers, administrators and other stakeholders as a central feature of school improvement. Responses to specific questions related to collaboration yielded a decidedly mixed picture as to how such collaboration is envisioned or carried out in separate districts and schools. Some schools appeared to engage in limited and targeted collaborative efforts pursuing specific educational solutions, rather than creating a system of ongoing engagement that invited participation of various stakeholders. In some instances, van Lier
(2009) noted that teacher participants in the Policy Matters study did not know which staff their district had included in the OIP development discussions. Based on the reports of those skeptical of or resistance to OIP implementation, van Lier cautioned that collaborative efforts are only as effective as the willingness of the various stakeholders to remain open-minded and engage in meaningful dialogue. To this end, the researcher advised that closer attention should be paid to creating and providing training in consensus discussions and decision-making situations so that truly effective program discussions have the opportunity to occur. Failing this, the researcher suggested, collaboration will remain “a meaningless buzzword,” (van Lier, 2009, p. 8).

Encouragingly, the teachers and administrators surveyed for the Policy Matters study invariably supported ongoing and instructionally targeted professional development. The administrators and teachers in the second cohort of large urban districts reported that the most successful school reforms had been realized through such development activities as expert coaching and the provision of additional supports in the classroom. Van Lier (2009) observed that such development efforts require funding that struggling schools in particular often find difficult to provide. Provisions by the Ohio Department of Education to support OIP schools in providing such coaching and training to teachers and administrators was viewed positively by the majority of the participant sample.

The Policy Matters research suggested some conflicting responses regarding the agreement with OIP implementation among participating districts and schools. And as van Lier (2009) observed at his writing, it was too early to assess the impact of the OIP on student achievement and to determine its effects on instructional improvement in the classroom. Lloyd et al. (2009) cautioned that the OIP was not intended to be a “silver bullet” or the last
word on Ohio’s “collective efforts,” (p. 1). Rather they described it as the groundwork for continuing discussions, investigations and initiatives that would serve to propel school improvement forward through future changes.

**Types of Educational Leadership**

The research on educational leadership focuses a great deal on the role of principals and teachers (McKenzie & Scheurich, 2008; Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008; Wohlstetter, Datnow & Park, 2008; Ylimaki, Jacobson & Drysdale, 2007), particularly when leadership is considered through the lens of student achievement. However there is increasing research attention devoted to leadership as it is realized at the state and district levels (Bredeson & Kose, 2007; Chrispeels, Burke, Johnson & Daly, 2008; Corcoran, Fuhrman & Belcher, 2001; Firestone & Martinez, 2007; Leithwood, 2010; Park & Datnow, 2009). Wahlstrom et al. (2010) identified three broad categories of leadership that track with leadership efforts extending beyond a single school setting and encompassing other administrators, educators, and stakeholders, along with the within-school leaders such as teachers and principals. These leadership categories are identified as collective, shared, and distributed leadership approaches and they are summarized here. Also summarized is instructional leadership which occurs within different leadership approaches or expressions of leadership.

**Collective Leadership**

Of the three types of leadership approaches, collective is the most egalitarian in theory. All stakeholders are perceived as having equal and mutual influence on targeted goals agreed on by the group that comprise a system. Consensus among stakeholders comes to shape the leadership decisions and practices (Miller & Rowan, 2006). Wahlstrom et al. (2010) reported that their research considering schools drawn from 43 school districts across
nine states, for a total of approximately 180 schools representing a comprehensive sample of demographics, school size and grade levels, revealed that collective leadership had a stronger positive impact on student learning than did individual sources of leadership. The schools with the highest student performance rates also exhibited the greatest commitment to engaging a range of stakeholders in the school’s decision-making and leadership processes. The researchers described this as having “‘fatter’ or ‘thicker’ decision-making structures, not simply ‘flatter’ ones, and leadership in these schools is more ‘intense’,” (Wahlstrom et al., 2010, p. 8).

Wahlstrom et al. (2010) also reported that in the schools with collective leadership in place, the teachers tended to attribute instructional effectiveness to the combined efforts of parents, students, and teacher teams. Parental involvement tends to be a feature of distributed leadership. While having a strong sense of collaboration and cooperation, Wahlstrom et al. reported that principals and district administrators tended to have more influence on decision-making than other stakeholders. But they were also able to determine, interestingly, that collective leadership was not a fixed or static dynamic; principals and district leaders who shared influence with others did not sacrifice any of their own influence. In other words, there was just that much more influence created and shared (also Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris & Hopkins, 2006). Another important finding was that teacher motivation, under collective leadership conditions had the greatest impact on student motivation.

**Shared Leadership**

Shared leadership embraces a team- or group-construct for arriving at decisions. Teams within a system may be tasked with different responsibilities and goals and they present recommendations or determinations to the larger group for final consideration.
Shared leadership is often seen within schools in which staff members share the responsibility for leading, based on their areas of expertise as well as their interest and commitment (Bligh, Pearce & Kohles, 2006; Marks & Nance, 2007). Wahlstrom et al. (2010) reported that for their research, they applied the shared leadership term to situations in which school leadership and instructional influence was largely concentrated within the school, among principals and teachers and, as other researchers have identified, the leadership of school counselors (Hopson & Lawson, 2011; Sink, 2009; Thompson & Moffett, 2008).

Within the shared leadership construct, teacher-to-teacher associations, particularly through somewhat structured professional learning communities, were identified by researchers as central to instructional improvement efforts (Louis, Wahlstrom, Michlin, Gordon, Thomas, Leithwood, & Moore, 2010). In fact, it is professional associations and support networks with peers that enable teachers to become leaders in their schools, researchers have contended (Carson et al., 2007). Beyond this, shared leadership efforts between principals and teachers have been shown to have positive effects on student achievement. Wahlstrom et al. (2010) speculated that this relationship reflected that teachers’ participation in professional learning communities leads to the implementation of instructional practices that support improvements in curriculum delivery and enhance student learning. While trust between principals and teachers had a positive effect on shared leadership overall, its effect on student achievement was less significant than instructional leadership and shared leadership quality.

**Distributed Leadership**

Distributed leadership is determined by assignments and leadership practices, rather than job title or official position. The focus here is on what leadership practices are employed
by which people within a given system, and how different patterns of leadership (direction and influence) intersect and manifest, whether these patterns appear to impact the effectiveness of the system, and whether certain patterns are more effective under particular conditions than others. Distributed leadership is frequently seen in multi-school, or district-wide systems, however it may also be practiced on a site-specific basis (within a single school) (Angelle, 2010; Firestone & Martinez, 2007).

In their research, Wahlstrom et al. (2010) observed three patterns of distributed leadership became clear over the course of their study.

1. The first pattern reflected systems in which principals worked directly with influential teachers as well as outside experts to create and implement improvement plans. The teachers within these schools worked very closely together to support improvement initiatives. Teacher leaders were inclined to work with each other across disciplines and grade levels to share information.

2. The second pattern of distributed leadership they identified found was one in which school principals worked on a range of school improvement initiatives but had relatively limited interaction with teacher leaders and external consultants or stakeholders. Teacher leaders tended to restrict their influence to their grade level and/or academic discipline and these schools reported lower teacher collaboration across the board.

3. The final pattern of distributed leadership is one in which principals control administrative oversight of improvement initiatives but do not tend to coordinate or influence the implementation of these initiatives. In these schools, individual teachers or external consultants or stakeholders are the leaders who undertake and
implement improvement efforts but there tends to be little to no collaboration with other teachers or administrators. Wahlstrom et al. (2010) reported that no particular pattern of distributed leadership is compellingly linked to the nature and quality of student achievement.

Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris and Hopkins (2006) conducted a review of studies examining the relationship of educational leadership to student achievement. One of their findings was that distributed leadership was shown to have a compelling impact on school success. The researchers employed the term “total leadership” to capture school system environments in which leadership from all sources – district-level educators and educational leaders (superintendent, central office staff, school board members, experts and community members) and school-based educators and stakeholders (principals, teachers, staff, parents, students) contributed to school planning and improvement efforts. Their analysis of the relevant research revealed that total leadership was indicated to have an extremely potent effect at 27% variation across schools for student achievement. Leithwood et al. reported that this was a significantly higher rate – two to three times as high, in fact – than that generally shown in studies assessing the effects of individual principal leadership on student achievement.

There is also evidence of differential effects for distributed leadership depending on how the patterns of distribution were realized in school systems (Robinson, Lloyd & Rowe, 2009). Leithwood et al. reported that 110 studies on schools engaged in distributed leadership revealed that “value-added student achievement” was impacted by different forms of distributed leadership (p. 13). In school systems in which the distributed leadership reflected a high degree of engagement from all sources of leadership across the various levels,
improvements in student achievement were the greatest. In schools that exhibited a more laissez-faire form of distributed leadership, with lower levels of initiation and influence exhibited by those engaged in the total leadership efforts, student improvement was lower. Total leadership that is well structured and coordinated and that reflects a high level of leader and stakeholder agreement thus appears to be recommended by the evidence (also Harris, 2007). The greatest positive effect was seen for schools that reported high rates of influence for teacher teams, parents and students. This analysis also indicated that the single most influential party to total leadership effects was the school principal, who indicated the greatest influence both positively and negatively. As with other studies reported in this literature review, Leithwood et al. (2006) reported that increased influence among other parties to total leadership did not detract from the principal’s power or leadership effects. In fact, the positive impact of principals is only enhanced when other leaders engage at a high level of participation.

**Instructional Leadership**

Wahlstrom et al. (2010) distinguished instructional leadership from the collective, shared, and distributed approaches they observed in the schools they studied. Instructional leadership can occur under different approaches or expressions of leadership. The focus is on how instruction is prioritized and influenced, separate from other concerns of educational leadership (e.g., management of staff). Two dimensions of instructional leadership were cited by the researchers.

1. The first of these is “instructional climate” which captures the culture of the school or the system and which Wahlstrom et al. connected to the level of commitment to professional development and continual learning for teachers and staff.
2. The second is “instructional actions” referring to the efforts undertaken by principals to engage directly with teachers about their professional learning and growth (p. 13). Educational leaders at all levels of the school system contribute to and shape instructional leadership from superintendents (Bredeson & Kose, 2007) and school board members on down to staff at individual schools. (Burch, 2007; Edge & Mylopoulos, 2008).

Wahlstrom et al.’s (2010) research revealed that in schools with high achievement levels for students, teachers reported a high level of instructional climate with a great deal of emphasis on continuing professional development of teachers (also Chrispeels et al., 2008). There was also a correlation found in schools with high instructional climates with principals who valued empirically-supported approaches to instruction and were committed to best practices exploration and implementation (also Lashway et al., 2003). The researchers did note a difference between elementary school teachers’ experience of high performing instructional climates and secondary school teachers’ experience of the same. For elementary school teachers, high instructional climate was associated with high levels of instructional action – their school principals were actively engaged with the elementary teachers. However, secondary school teachers rarely reported high instructional action levels on the part of school leaders (principals, department heads and teacher leaders included). On a likely related noted, Wahlstrom et al. observed that of the 127 schools included in the second phase of their study, middle and secondary schools comprised the majority of those that had principals with the lowest rates of engagement with teachers’ instructional practices. Additionally, and significantly, the largest percentage of schools reporting the lowest rates of
student achievement were secondary schools and these schools also comprised the lowest rate of instructional actions by principals or other educational leaders.

**District-Level Leadership**

Much of the research on state and district approaches to improving school climate and increasing student achievement that was conducted prior to the reform movement beginning in the 1990s, with a strong emphasis on accountability standards, demonstrated that there was little consistency across school districts in terms of strategies to improve instruction and learning. The accountability movement, particularly once entrenched with the passage of the NCLB, has ushered in a period of increased focus on district-level commitments to school improvement. Despite the “uniformity of expectations at either the state or the federal level” the “differences among districts in size, history, and leadership capacities . . . condition how these policies are carried out,” (Wahlstrom et al., 2010, p. 17). This accounts for what Wahlstrom et al. (2010) observed in their research across 43 school districts that found that even as these districts were working to meet the same federal standards and similar state standards of performance, their strategies for doing so differed substantially.

**Facets of District Leadership**

The role that districts may play in shaping individual school success in improving student achievement is one that appears to be garnering close attention in today’s educational climate. This interest, or perhaps renewed interest, in the importance of district leadership also reflects a shift in perceptions about the function of educational leadership beyond the school-level. In the 1980s, the view of educational leadership at the district level was regarded in a somewhat more skeptical light as described by Waters and Marzano (2006) who attributed this perspective to the influence of then Secretary of Education William Bennett
who described district level educational leaders (superintendents, school board members, administrative staff) as the “blob,” (Waters & Marzano, 2006, p. 8). Bennett contended that district level educational staff was not influential in terms of student achievement and, in fact, argued that these administrators consumed valuable resources and resisted reform efforts without contributing meaningfully to the development of children. Waters and Marzano agreed that some district administrations can devolve into ineffective bureaucracies and that, in such instances, superintendents and other district level leaders will often not have a positive effect on student learning improvements. But they also argued that their own research provided compelling evidence of the positive and meaningful impact that effective district leadership could have on student achievement.

Much of the research on school improvement efforts that go beyond the individual school tends to focus on district-level leadership and management (Bredeson & Kose, 2007; Chrispeels et al., 2008; Corcoran et al., 2001; Hannay, Manning & Earl, 2006; Hannay, Manning, Earl & Blair, 2006; Leithwood, 2003, 2010; Palandra, 2010). There is comparatively little on the role of state leadership in school improvement efforts (Burch, 2007; Lingenfelter, 2007). Togneri and Anderson (2003) spoke of the role of the state in their analysis of exemplary district-level leadership in hard-to-serve communities. They noted that several of their five study districts reported favorable interactions with their states’ department of education and administrative leadership, while the remainder expressed more unfavorable views of their state’s educational leadership. That said, Togneri and Anderson expressed some surprise at the fact that all five districts managed to use state initiatives to enhance their own district-level improvement processes. Three of the districts credited their state’s accountability policies and progress standards as stimulating their successful school
improvement efforts. These districts expressed a degree of satisfaction with the support and guidance provided by state authorities for improving instruction to students and reported that they could reach out to state-level representatives to obtain support when they felt it necessary to do so.

School districts that took advantage of state requirements to improve programming were inclined to perceive state mandates as opportunities to grow and strengthen their service to students. As Togneri and Anderson (2003) observed, these districts were not merely reactive to state requirements but were proactive in using these requirements to inform their own improvement efforts and embark on changes to their system. These districts also became more engaged in state policy formation by enlisting district-level leaders to become better informed about state-level practices and to engage in legislative discussions and seek to influence state educational policy formation. In this way, the distributed leadership approach was directed upward and outward, with district-level “experts” being charged with learning about state processes and becoming involved in impacting work at the state level, a sort of mirror image of what was occurring from the district leadership at the system-wide level down to leadership efforts within the individual schools. In these state-district relationships, the engagement was mutual and reciprocal with state authorities becoming increasingly more responsive to district needs and concerns as the district leader’s presence became more developed at the state relationship level.

The remaining two school districts in Togneri and Anderson’s (2003) study had a decidedly more mixed association with their respective states’ educational agencies and leaders. Both districts reported that they struggled to maintain useful partnerships with their state educational leaders, describing relationships in which mandates were handed down with
little regard for the obstacles the districts would encounter in trying to meet them and what sacrifices might be entailed in other services. These districts reported that their efforts to communicate and collaborate with state educational authorities were either ignored or rebuffed. However, even despite these challenges, both districts managed to convert state mandates in their favor to realize more effective instructional delivery to students. One district interpreted a state guideline as a goalpost for targeting professional development and the commitment of resources that the district made (along with compensatory funding from the state) turned the challenge of the mandate into a programmatic advantage by paying for professional development materials and expert trainers. The other district similarly concentrated state funds in professional development efforts, even as it chafed at what it perceived as the states out of touch selection of standardized measures that did not properly align with stated goals and an overweening interference in how schools functioned. Basically these forward thinking districts sought to make lemonade out of the lemons they got from the state by prioritizing teacher and principal development in ways that effectively impacted student learning.

Wahlstrom et al. (2010) and Salazar (2007) reported their research indicated that when school districts made a commitment to professional development of principals and teachers they created environments to support organizational reform and appeared to positively impact student learning. Wahlstrom et al. distilled seven characteristics of positive district orientation from the narratives provided by the principals in their study. These characteristics help to increase principals’ sense of efficacy in their leadership roles through district efforts that:
1. Secure the funding and other important resources (personnel, time) necessary to support school improvement;

2. Encourage and support parental and community involvement and engagement in the schools;

3. Enable schools to craft their own approach, specific to their various stakeholders’ needs, to meet district goals;

4. Require principals and teachers to make data-based decisions;

5. Support/assist principals/teachers in identifying, interpreting and applying data;

6. Empower principals to hire the people they identify as necessary to school improvement efforts; and

7. Clearly articulate performance standards and student achievement expectations that are supported through district-wide curriculum.

The researchers noted that observing only several of these characteristics while ignoring others could create “systemic tension” and create potential problems for school districts that engaged in selective forms of engagement and support, rather than the full range of support. For instance, Wahlstrom et al. (2010) observed that a seemingly beneficial characteristic such as supporting ongoing professional development of teachers and principals was not shown to be useful or effective as a stand-alone device, particularly when uncoupled from district identification of target goals for student performance. Conversely, setting clear goals for student achievement did not produce clear gains for districts in the absence of concerted professional development efforts. Another example of selective district attention was identified as harmful to student learning improvements, such as when districts provided professional development that failed to account for the flexibility necessary for improvement
implementation efforts in different schools serving populations of students with very different needs.

**District-Level Leadership**

Togneri and Anderson (2003) described district level leadership as evolving out of the recognition that sustainable instructional improvement directed toward increasing student achievement was not something that could be addressed solely by single (or single-level) stakeholders. They observed that the traditional view of the principal, with the general supervision and guidance of the superintendent, as being primarily responsible for envisioning improvement efforts and putting them in place, has been acknowledged as not sufficient to the task, especially in today’s accountability standards-driven environment. Over the last several decades a consensus has emerged that multiple stakeholders must be involved in the planning and implementation if meaningful and lasting improvement is to occur. At the district level this includes superintendents, assistant superintendents, central office staff, school board members, union leaders and, at the school-level this includes principals, teacher leaders, teachers, counselors and other school staff. Togneri and Anderson noted that some districts move beyond the school system stakeholders and include political representatives, educational consultants, and academics drawn from higher education, and other interested members of the community in their leadership efforts.

The balance is found in establishing strong relationships between the stakeholders which can best be supported through clear guidelines for structuring responsibilities and leadership tasks that enable stakeholders to feel supported in their work and in their interactions with one another (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson & Wahlstrom, 2004). Togneri and Anderson (2003) studied five school districts that had a high degree of low-income
students and were showing steady improvement gains in student achievement to determine how instructional leadership was being implemented in these districts. They found that in three of the districts there was a high level of coordination and collaboration between the district level stakeholders and in their relations with the school-level leaders. In these districts the researchers observed regular communication over instructional challenges between central office staff, school board members, union leaders and the school superintendents. This regular communication, supported through structured systems such as teams and cross-role leadership, was essential in enabling the participants to share ideas and assume leadership on specific and necessary tasks without a great deal of debate or resistance occurring to slow implementation efforts down. Process was at the heart of this effort, and the process embraced at the district level was mirrored at the school level with teachers using the same strategies in their department or grade-level meetings.

Togneri and Anderson (2003) reported that the low-income, high achieving districts they considered in their study, tended to represent a distributed leadership orientation and one they described as working toward “comparative advantage,” (p. 33). These districts realized that instructional improvement could best be realized when stakeholders applied their particular expertise – or comparative advantage – in directions that served the improvement effort, so that leadership tasks were targeted to those best situated to fulfill them. In simple terms this meant that school board members focused on creating policies directed toward instructional reform; they did not involve themselves in the specifics of how that instructional delivery would occur in the classroom. Superintendents and central office staff devised systems for supporting teacher interactions and identifying funding and programming that supported professional development and training in service of the instructional goals outlined
with the school board members in collaboration with the other key stakeholders. Togneri and Anderson stated that putting these systems in place and securing comparative advantage through distributed leadership, freed up principals to become more actively engaged in instructional improvement. Principals were enabled and empowered to work with their school-level staff to respond to challenges and adapt programming and professional development as weaknesses were identified so that instructional delivery to students continued to be refined and improved. This distributed leadership also distributed accountability efforts so that school-level ownership of solutions to process deficits could be explored and attempted.

The examination of district level leadership allowed Togneri and Anderson (2003) to observe and isolate aspects of stakeholder leadership focus. They found that school boards were by and large focused on policy for instructional reform and accountability and remained somewhat removed from daily administration of the schools which they were comfortable leaving to the superintendent and school leaders to manage. The researchers observed that in the successful districts they studied, the school boards were primarily motivated by the desire to improve student achievement. While individual board members may express different opinions about how this is best realized, they were in agreement on this overall objective. A salient feature of these boards was that they emphasized the need to “speak with one voice” in terms of policy creation and in their public statements (p. 33). Given that the boards exemplified a high degree of solution-seeking orientation, their emphasis on consensus seems to be a natural outcome of that perspective. These boards tended to encourage their staff to explore creative solutions and to be willing to take risks and the researchers observed that this progressive leadership attitude trickled down to all levels of the educational system. Togneri
and Anderson reported a high level of belief in the need for collegiality on the board and the importance of arriving at decisions through discussion and by identifying consensus. One of the interesting findings associated with the school board members in these successful districts is that in four out of the five districts, school board members were elected at large, rather than within a specific region or jurisdiction and this appeared to create fewer opportunities for divisiveness.

The staff of the district central office can play a significant role in leadership for instruction and achievement improvement. In the distributed leadership orientation of comparative advantage, the central office staff is well situated to devise district-level curriculum and create the system-wide supports for professional development of principals and teachers. In fact, Togneri and Anderson (2003) contended that if these functions are not assumed by central office staff they likely languish and are not carried out in a consistent manner across the school system but rather realized in a haphazard, case-by-case manner. It is the central office that can bring principals from around the district together to contribute to and help devise a comprehensive curriculum plan across the grades that also outlines expectations and defines accountability standards and the measures that will be used to make assessments. In truly collaborative systems, the principals will go back to their schools and solicit input and feedback from teachers and other interested parties to strengthen the specifics of curriculum plans and highlight where obstacles may be encountered and what can be done to address these challenges.

The most collaborative, and effective, districts in Togneri and Anderson’s (2003) study were those that engaged stakeholders at all levels right from the start of initiative
discussions. This meant that teachers, principals, and other interested stakeholders could participate in the development of the policies they would be working with down the road.

This approach appeared to foster a safe environment in which participants at all levels could take risks designed to improve the system and increase instructional effectiveness to raise student achievement. By effecting regular monitoring of initiatives and general improvement efforts, the district ensured that a misguided effort would not continue for too long before it was identified and addressed. This type of accountability, rather than proving threatening to stakeholders, actually reinforced the sense of empowerment because everyone understood a process was in place to identify problems quickly and to come up with new solutions.

**Educational Leaders**

**The Role of the Superintendent**

While each individual superintendent brings his or her own set of skills and talents to the position and often has some latitude in how this expertise is brought to bear in a given district, based on the particular conditions and the needs of the various stakeholders, the enormous wealth of literature on the job of the superintendent provides some general consensus on what comprises the effective superintendency (Bredeson & Kose, 2007). In terms of research tying superintendent leadership to student learning, Waters and Marzano (2006) stated that most effective superintendents embrace collaboration with educational stakeholders and include other administrators, school board members, and school-level administrators in the necessary process of identifying “non-negotiable goals” for student performance (p. 11). These researchers cautioned that collaboration does not necessarily imply that all stakeholders must be wholly in agreement with the goals but that rather, given
an exchange of ideas and arguments, that a general agreement is reached and that all parties agree to support the goals identified.

Togneri and Anderson (2003) reported that the successful superintendents in their study demonstrated a remarkable level of consistency between each other in their leadership actions. This similarity in basic leadership practices has been found in other studies as well (Leithwood et al., 2006). They observed that the superintendents all exhibited visionary qualities and were highly visible in their interactions with others, they were instructionally focused, interested in best practices research and evidence-based strategies, and were responsive to situations and committed to seeking innovative solutions. In terms of visionary qualities, the superintendents expressed enthusiasm about improvement possibilities and animated the consideration of reform by providing substantive and constructive information to policy and implementation discussions. Togneri and Anderson stated that while school boards often brought the sense of urgency to improving service delivery to students, the visionary superintendents helped ground this urgency in outlining practical instruction supports. In virtually all these improvement-focused districts, the superintendent was the leader who brought curriculum enhancement and professional development processes to the forefront of reform efforts. The superintendents were also the ones to lead the charge influencing other stakeholder leaders to make the resource allocations necessary to support improvement initiatives. The most effective superintendents also made regular visits to principals and their schools to observe how instructional improvement efforts were coming along and to reinforce the sense of collaboration and communication across the system and at all levels of educational delivery (also Murphy, Elliott, Goldring & Porter, 2007).
Effective superintendents embrace challenges and seek solutions. They reach out to other stakeholders for their expertise (their comparative advantage) and do not balk when confronted with a difficult situation. Togneri and Anderson (2003) reported that the superintendents in their study were notable for their willingness to accept and use accountability requirements to improve their district’s educational practice. They did not fight against or attempt to downplay negative performance indicators; rather they perceived this data as a tool for identifying weaknesses in instructional delivery and an opportunity to create a new and better strategy. One of the superintendents in Togneri and Anderson’s study, concerned about poor student performance in the district high schools, went back to the data and worked with her central office research department to identify student achievement trends. She determined that high school students were performing most poorly in math and social studies; this was true even for students with high attendance, thereby eliminating the possible cause of student absence or attrition contributing to the problem. By isolating the conditions of the poor performance, the superintendent was able to go directly to the high school math and social studies departments in her school system and work with them to devise an appropriate response – more effective curriculum and improved classroom practice – that would improve student learning.

Togneri and Anderson (2003) suggested that bringing union representatives into district-level leadership considerations was another effective strategy for ensuring stakeholder agreement with district instructional objectives. One of the greatest challenges to reform in any system is the basic human fear of being left behind or replaced when change is introduced. By engaging union representatives in the leadership practice, district leaders send the message that they are responsive to teacher concerns. Union leaders can be particularly
effective in providing feedback on professional development and articulating teachers’
thoughts or fears about instructional changes. In some of the districts Togneri and Anderson
considered, union leaders were very useful in serving a mediating function between teachers
who were resistant to reform efforts or to specific practices being introduced and the district
leaders. In some instances, district initiatives were adapted to address concerns expressed by
union leaders on behalf of district teachers while in other cases, the presence or participation
of the union leader in an improvement practice, such as classroom observations by principals
or professional coaches, enabled an otherwise threatening development (from the resistant
teacher’s vantage point) to be diffused and normalized as a function of non-evaluative
instructional support.

**Superintendents and Non-negotiable Goals**

The two fundamental areas for goal setting are in classroom instruction and student
achievement. Waters and Marzano (2006) described the superintendent’s function here as
directing and ensuring that target achievement goals are set for the district, for individual
schools in the district, and for special populations of students within the district, with the
recognition that different schools will be addressing different populations of students with
sometimes wildly different learner profiles and educational needs. Once established, non-
negotiable goals for student achievement provide a useful structure for principals and teachers
to work with when they are supported by the resources that enable them to achieve these
goals. Critical components of the necessary resources are comprehensive instructional
planning and design based on empirically supported research. Effective district leadership
does not mean arriving at a single instructional format or insistence on a strict methodology
that all teachers, in all classrooms, across all schools must adhere to in order to meet district
standards. Rather, effective instructional goal setting at the district level recognizes that flexibility in pedagogic approach or lesson plan design may be necessary to serve diverse populations of learners. The key is to identify a common instructional vocabulary for the district so that all educators are on the same proverbial page and there is awareness that the district pursues best practices in instructional implementation.

The non-negotiable core messages established by the OLAC for the OIP were situated in best practices research that OLAC identified for creating and sustaining improvement efforts in instruction and achievement. Six non-negotiables were outlined for the OIP:

1. “Leadership is a shared responsibility.” This non-negotiable defines leadership not as a job-specific function, but as a set of critical practices driving to improvement reform that targets student achievement. Within this definition, any stakeholder working with intent towards instructional and achievement goals is engaged in the shared leadership function.

2. “Leadership is a process distributed across an entire school system.” This statement acknowledges the role that all levels of staff and support, from the district headquarters to the individual departments within a school. The implication is that everyone’s buy-in with the district-wide goals is required if success is to be realized.

3. “Accountability for school improvement requires leadership structures.” With this non-negotiable message, the OLAC expresses its intent to utilize leadership teams to create and sustain the improvement efforts for the district and within individual schools. These teams enable the members to monitor progress and to
maintain accountability for efforts as well as to offer recommendations for improvement to the system as it changes.

4. “A collective focus on full and sustained implementation” is required. The OLAC noted that “a few potent yet flexible strategies” that are carefully monitored enable efforts toward improvement in instruction and achievement. This tenet essentially acknowledges the need for a solid but broadly framed district-level structure that allows for accommodation as necessary at the school-specific level.

5. “The OIP” as a structured format for improvement must be implemented by schools. This core message of observance of the OIP is a clear non-negotiable. As stated in the OLAC non-negotiables statement, the OIP is “a structured process based on the use of a connected set of tools for reviewing, analyzing, and basing decisions on relevant data” and in doing so “provides a vehicle for initiating Ohio’s Leadership Development Framework in ways that are responsive to stakeholders’ insights about local commitments, needs, and assets.”

6. “All learning, including teachers’ learning of instructional practices, depends on changes in behavior.” Among the OIP provisions is the commitment to regular monitoring of classroom instruction with teachers being provided expert feedback on their instructional practice. Other professional development opportunities that strengthen teachers’ understanding of best practices are also required of schools so that teachers not only are situated to meet “external requirements” (federal standards for performance) but are able to develop and demonstrate a complete understanding of how their instructional practice may be improved through further education, development and feedback. (OLAC non-negotiables, n.d.)
The role of the superintendent in district leadership and his or her effects on school instruction and achievement are explored more extensively later in this chapter but it is worth noting what Waters and Marzano (2006) described as a “bonus finding” from their meta-analysis of the studies on superintendents’ leadership and school achievement. They reported that, while it was not a factor they identified for consideration at the outset of their research, they found a compelling correlation between superintendent tenure and student achievement; in other words, superintendent longevity, beginning after just two years in the position, was shown to have a positive and significant impact on student achievement. This finding was cited by Waters and Marzano as evidence that district level leadership is clearly connected to student achievement, even at such a basic level as job tenure, and the implication is that more concerted efforts at planning and leadership to realize student improvement could potentially have a major impact on instruction and achievement.

**Principals**

Togneri and Anderson (2003) found the district leaders in their study identified principals, from a distributed leadership orientation, as having the expertise to lead instructional improvement at the school level, within the district’s framework for improvement. Consistent with this, they found that the principals largely described their leadership function as supporting the instructional work of their school’s teachers. On a practical level this means setting aside time and resources for teacher collaboration, providing guidance on curriculum implementation, working with teachers to identify obstacles to meeting district goals, reinforcing and modeling agreement with non-negotiable district goals for school staff, being visible in the classrooms and providing nonevaluative feedback to teachers, supervising teacher teams in identifying and strengthening or obtaining instructional
supports, and continue to enhance and improve professional development opportunities for school staff (also Bligh et al., 2006; Chrispeels et al., 2008).

Many principals, and this appears to be especially true at the elementary school level, are frequent visitors to their teachers’ classrooms and engaged teachers and teacher leaders in ongoing conversations about how best to improve instructional supports and delivery of curriculum to students. Jacobson (2010) reported that student achievement is positively impacted by these types of principal leadership practices and that, further, the processes shaped by such relationships are the basis for sustainable success. The best principals also see their leadership function as connected to boosting school morale, by encouraging staff and complimenting teachers on good work. This positive acknowledgement of the good instructional practices or leadership behaviors of others in the schools is a significant factor cited by many teachers in their reports of positive interactions with their school principals (Lashway et al., 2003; Togneri & Anderson, 2003). Principals who welcome opportunities for collaborative efforts with their teachers, principal peers, and other district administrators, as well as other stakeholders such as parents and community members tend to be highly effective (Lyons & Algozzine, 2006). Those who resist collaboration or any form of sharing leadership often do so out of concern that their autonomy will be challenged or lost, and for these principals there may be a real challenge in engaging them in team efforts such as shared and distributive leadership strategies (Harris, Brown & Abbott, 2006; Torres, Zellner & Erlandson, 2008).

Of course, strong and effective principals do not spring full-grown from Zeus’ head but rather are the product of excellent training and development. In fact, one could argue this is true for virtually all leaders. The principals in Togneri and Anderson’s (2003) study were
successful in their leadership of their schools toward greater student achievement because they were well supported by their district leadership plan. Many of the principals had received training or worked with consultants to learn how to provide useful nonevaluative feedback to teachers based on their classroom observations. They were able to identify and obtain helpful curriculum materials because their district leadership had clearly identified the goals that needed to be met and allocated the funding and resources necessary. These principals had opportunity to communicate and collaborate with fellow principals in their district and these relationships, supported by the district and the superintendent, gave these principals a network of peers with whom they could safely exchange ideas and concerns, make recommendations and provide or receive assistance when needed (Lyons & Algozzine, 2006).

By working closely with district central office leaders and staff, principals can develop their own in-school networks of leadership support with assistant principals and teacher leaders assuming roles along the comparative advantage continuum. Thus, a teacher leader in the science department can provide specific and detailed expertise on curriculum planning in that area, that a principal who might not have the same mastery of science would likely lack. The expectation that other school administrators and teachers can become curriculum leaders is both a powerful source of encouragement to school staff and a vital and valuable resource to schools and, ultimately, to students. This also speaks to the importance of creating and sustaining relationships across the leadership capacities. As with the evidence that superintendent longevity in a position has been tracked with student achievement (Waters & Marzano, 2006), there is evidence that principal turnover has a powerful, negative impact on schools’ improvement progress, regardless of the strength and quality of the teaching.
Leithwood et al. (2006) referred to the “devastating effects” that sudden principal turnover can have on school initiatives, particularly those driving toward student achievement.

**Teachers**

The role of teacher leaders is critical in school improvement efforts. Teachers constitute the frontline in educational delivery, and study after study has overwhelmingly indicated that teacher effectiveness in classroom instruction is the single most important factor in influencing student achievement (Leithwood et al., 2006; Wahlstrom et al., 2010). Teacher leaders may be formally identified as such or they may be informally recognized within their schools and districts as exemplary instructional advocates and practitioners with the ability to persuade and influence others. Teacher leaders can assume a variety of responsibilities ranging from mentoring other teachers to identifying the most current best practices evidence and informing others of this knowledge, to creating curriculum plans that may be used by departments, schools, or across the system. Working closely with principals, teacher leaders can be enormously useful in deepening principals’ understanding of issues arising in classroom practice, emerging trends, or in identifying potential obstacles to improvement efforts (Loeb, Elfers & Plecki, 2010).

Teacher leaders engaged in district-wide instructional improvement efforts are often trained at the district level and in concert with the district’s plan for reform and identified non-negotiable goals (Togneri & Anderson, 2003). Those who participate in district-level meetings on improvement develop a comprehensive knowledge of district strategies and they are then particularly well suited for transmitting these strategies directly to classroom practice (Edge & Mylopoulos, 2008). Conversely, a teacher’s presence in these leadership meetings allows for the experience of the critical practitioners to be heard and considered as
determinations about instructional improvement are being made. There is evidence that teacher leaders may encounter the greatest challenge, among all educational leaders, in terms of balancing their leadership roles with their practical duties as teachers (Firestone & Martinez, 2007). In their efforts to provide ongoing instructional support to other teachers, teacher leaders often had difficulty finding enough time in the day to provide adequate follow-up with other teachers, negotiating as there were both instructional and administrative workloads (Togneri & Anderson, 2003). Teacher leaders are generally subject to high expectations from both the central office and their school principals to be available to other teachers for coaching, advisement and mentoring and, further principals and district leaders often gave additional administrative work to teacher leaders. These demands impeded these teachers ability to further develop their classroom practice. Given the critical function that teacher leaders serve in the instructional improvement process, it behooves district leaders to consider ways in which teacher leaders can be best supported in their various administrative and instructional functions.

School Leadership and Student Achievement

Wahlstrom et al. (2010) stated that across five years of research examining the relationship of educational leadership and student learning their conviction had strengthened that leadership was one of the most significant factor impacting student achievement, second only to classroom instruction among all school-related factors (Leithwood et al., 2006). While a number of factors, singly or in combination, have been indicated to effect student learning, educational leadership has been demonstrated to be a distinct feature, serving to coordinate many of these other factors so that they can more effectively support student learning.
Accountability and Assessing Leadership Effects

The reform movement that currently dominates the educational environment has prioritized accountability requirements as a central aspect of school improvement efforts. Federal and state initiatives have, in large part, sought to exact greater control over instructional programming with the expectations that the policies established will be necessarily executed across the system. However as Marks and Nance (2007) noted the decentralization of policy that often occurs as individual districts and then schools, variously attempt to interpret and apply these standards can produce confusion and a lack of consistency leading to a “systemic dilemma” in which school leaders authority and ability to direct efforts can be frustrated and inhibited (also Budge, 2010).

The issue of accountability is a apprehensive one for many educational researchers and practitioners. There is a strong undercurrent of criticism about the burden that fixed accountability standards place on school systems already stretched thin in terms of what is being required in terms of the range of services necessary to meet student needs at the same time that districts are encountering dwindling streams of funding and other resources. A number of recent studies have argued that accountability is inherently damaging to meaningful and well-rounded educational environments, prizing the immediate goal of a high standardized measurement score that may be best achieved through rote memorization, over deeper and more challenging cognitive learning opportunities that build critical thinking skills and are generally held by researchers to signify true intellectual development (Wang et al., 2006). Other research has identified difficulties schools have in connecting standardized assessment results to instructional planning for student improvement; in many instances, what is lacking is the knowledge to bring a sophisticated integration of data to decision-making for

Despite the objections raised against employing accountability as a driving force in school improvement, the fact is that accountability is the value federal and state authorities attach to educational programming today and districts and schools must address the expectations set out by policy and mandate (Crum, 2009). As discussed earlier in this chapter with regard to the initial responses of school districts to OIP implementation (van Lier, 2009), many district and school leaders have adapted to the accountability requirements they are confronted with and have used them to spur programming initiatives and collaborative efforts at the district and local levels. Similar efforts to use data for accountability to improve instructional capacity and increase student learning have been reported in other studies (Chrispeels et al., 2008; Firestone & Shipps, 2005).

Geijsel, Kruger and Sleegers (2010) described a program in The Netherlands that employed a system of data gathering, feedback and application through a multi-school management team of experts working closely with school principals to support school improvement. The researchers surveyed 18 elementary school principals in The Netherlands and also observed how they used the data assessment to further drive change toward increased student achievement in their schools. In the early stages of the study, principals expressed concerns about the project ranging from uncertainty that the data system could genuinely lead to school improvement rather than be used as a (negative) evaluative tool about principal leadership practices and teacher instructional practices, others saw the multi-school nature of the project management as a potential threat to their authority, and others perceived the multi-
nature aspect as evidence that the system would lead to one-size-fits-all solutions that would not meet the particular needs of their school (also Torres et al., 2008). Still other principals in the survey were neutral in their expectations and several others expressed interest in and curiosity about the project, hoping that the data system might help them convert accountability requirements into meaningful improvement practice (also Lyons & Algozzine, 2006; MacBeath, 2008; Noonan & Renihan, 2006).

The team meetings and discussion with the principals proved to be enormously useful. Half of the participants reported the discussions on policy in the multi-school meetings to be essential for interpreting their schools data – and in the context of considering other school’s data – and observed that their internal systems of self-evaluation and discussion had become more streamlined and effective while also proving to be less threatening to teachers and other staff (and presumably, the principals themselves) who came to regard their school’s evaluative data as a mechanism for growth rather than a condition for self-laceration or punitive measures. It is likely the number of principal participants reporting success with the data project would have been higher but only 10 of the 18 principals responded to the follow-up survey at the close of the research effort. When the researchers contacted the non-responding principals they reported they had not found the time to adequately respond to the survey before the return date. This problem of time is significant because it was the primary obstacle identified by virtually all 18 principals to continuing to maintain this level of collaboration through multi-school team meetings and school-specific meetings going forward in their efforts to ground improvement efforts in the collection and translation of accountability data.
Research on the Impact of Leadership on Achievement

Waters and Marzano (2006) reported that their meta-analysis of 27 studies exploring the impact that school district leaders had on student performance revealed that there was a statistically significant correlation between student achievement and school district leadership. They also noted that an earlier, similar study they conducted with McNulty showed that principal and school-level leadership also had a significant relationship to student achievement (Marzano, Waters & McNulty, 2005, as cited by Waters & Marzano, 2006, p. 6). In their study of superintendents and district leadership, Waters and Marzano singled out studies published between 1970 and 2005 that examined the relationship between district leadership and student achievement and that utilized some form of standardized measurement of student achievement or an index based on a standardized measurement to arrive at an assessment. Their final cohort of 27 studies that met their qualifications accounted for 2,714 school districts, ratings for 4,434 superintendents, and approximately 3.4 million student achievement scores.

Through their meta-analysis of these 27 studies, the researchers found that 14 of the studies (accounting for 1,210 districts) provided data correlating overall district-level leadership to average student achievement for that district and they determined a significant correlation of 0.24. Waters and Marzano (2006) provided a useful explication of this statistic noting that an average superintendent at the 50th percentile leading a district in which the average student achievement was also at the 50th percentile, could positively improve student achievement by 9.5 percentile points if the district leadership improved by one standard deviation. Their research also enabled them to identify several specific leadership responsibilities they claimed provided direct evidence of impact on student achievement.
gains. These behaviors included goal-setting, settling on “non-negotiable goals for achievement and instruction,” obtaining school board agreement with and support for district-wide objectives, monitoring instruction and achievement to assure alignment with goals, and identifying and providing the resources necessary to enable schools to achieve these goals.

A feature of true leadership effectiveness is that all the parties to the leadership effort work in tandem with, and not in opposition to, each other. Waters and Marzano (2006) referenced this when they discussed the relationship of principal leadership to superintendent leadership and observed that if district-level leadership is to positively impact student achievement, it is necessary that principals both explicitly and implicitly support the identified and non-negotiable instructional and achievement goals arrived at by the superintendent and other district-level leaders. While explicit support is evident in principals carrying out plans to meet the district goals, implicit support was identified by Waters and Marzano as doing nothing “to subvert the accomplishment of those goals such as criticizing district goals or subtly communicating that the goals the district has selected are inappropriate or unattainable,” (p. 12).

Effective superintendent leadership is seen in districts where the school boards are aligned with the district goals and reflect support for the non-negotiable goals for achievement and instruction in their decision-making and budget allocations for the district’s schools. Waters and Marzano (2006) stated that evidence of this alignment is apparent when districts can undertake other initiatives but maintain the commitment and follow-through on their achievement and instruction goals as their first priority, regardless of other work they may be exploring or implementing. To this end, the researchers recommended that school boards, in tandem with district superintendents establish multi-year plans (e.g. five year plans) that
outline general target goals for schools in terms of achievement and instruction expectations. The superintendent may be the key in keeping school boards focused and committed to their non-negotiable goals. While individual board members may want to pursue other goals, these need to be managed so that the emphasis remains on instruction and achievement targets. The research reviewed by Waters and Marzano strongly suggested that in instances where school boards exhibited some distraction in their commitment to supporting instruction and achievement plans, and pursued other objectives, it was often to the demonstrable detriment of realizing improvement in instruction or student achievement. These suffered when school boards became distracted from their commitment to improvement goals.

Another facet of effective leadership is monitoring the progress of plans pursuing achievement and instruction goals. In the absence of consistent and meaningful monitoring of progress, plans can become muddied or may fall to the side altogether. Effective monitoring means that each school is required to assess how it is doing in meeting the district-identified goals and how effectively students are being served (Robinson et al., 2009). If there is little to no evidence of improvement following plan implementation, the educational leaders must consider several possibilities. The first of these is that the improvement efforts the school is purportedly embarking on are not being sufficiently realized and that greater effort and attention must be paid to properly and fully executing the plan for improvement. If the problem is not in the plan’s execution, it may lie in inadequate resources being targeted to support the effort; for instance, it may be that teachers require more extensive professional development. On a similar note, the commitment of school-level administration and staff may need to be reviewed in terms of establishing that there is both explicit and implicit agreement with the improvement objectives. Alternatively, it may be that implementation and practice
has revealed that the plan for improvement of instruction and achievement for that particular school is missing its mark in terms of effectively serving the specific student population’s needs. The approach for meeting target goals may need to be revised so as to improve delivery to special needs students, for instance. Without meaningful monitoring of whether the non-negotiable goals are being met, it may be difficult to identify and resolve school-delivery challenges before they become both significant and entrenched. When target goals are effectively identified and schools are familiar with the processes for monitoring achievement, they are able to measure their success in realizing these goals and to identify the areas where they need to concentrate effort to improve (Jacobson, 2010).

As mentioned briefly above, effective district leadership entails the management and allocation of resources necessary to support schools in their work to improve instruction and student achievement. All the good intentions in the world are for naught if the ability to authentically realize target goals is prevented through lack of material and other supports. Given the current and worldwide climate of economic cautious or, in some cases austerity, making available the necessary financial and structural resources necessary to achieve improvement change often means difficult decisions for leaders. In the case of district educational leaders there may be hard choices about what programs or initiatives to set aside or cut in order to free up resources to support instructional and achievement goals. This too is a necessary part of leadership and making evidence-supported choices about what to support and what to de-prioritize is critical to realizing success in meeting these non-negotiable targets in a fiscally constrained environment (Taylor, 2010). Waters and Marzano (2006) were emphatic in arguing that professional development for both teachers and principals should be a central feature of any district improvement efforts. They clarified that such professional
development should be focused on the competencies and knowledge relevant to meeting the
district’s goals; it is not enough to send principals or teachers to a single eight-hour training
on better communication and call it a day (van Lier, 2009). Training must be dovetailed with
the district’s educational needs and designed to improve mastery of the non-negotiable goals
for instruction and achievement. Holloway (2006) argued that effective professional
development has been shown to have a direct impact on student achievement.

It is, at least in part, the district’s ability to control the necessary resources to support
efforts to meet instructional and achievement goals that may differentiate reform success at
the school-level versus at the district level. Waters and Marzano (2006) observed that there
have been contradictory findings in some studies examining success of site-based
management in terms of student achievement. Research has indicated that school autonomy
in improvement efforts has been correlated with both improved achievement and with
decreased achievement. Their further analysis led them to conclude that the effect of school-
based leadership autonomy was essentially a nullified correlation of zero, on average. They
explained high achieving autonomous schools to having excellent resources available to them
and a well-structured district plan that thoroughly lays out expectations, coupled with a
superintendent who is disposed to encouraging strong school-based leadership such that the
schools’ “defined autonomy” is determined “within the boundaries defined by the district
goals,” (Waters & Marzano, 2006, p. 13). In other words, successful schools that appear to be
autonomous in their instructional and achievement leadership are in fact often situated in
larger educational systems in which the framework for instruction and achievement is well-
articulated and fully supported by the district level leaders.
Leithwood et al. (2006) reviewed a series of relevant and reliable school leadership studies and reported that they could not find “a single documented case of a school successfully turning around its pupil achievement trajectory in the absence of talented leadership,” (Leithwood et al., 2006, p. 5). They distilled from these studies five primary sources of evidence on which they based seven claims about the role and significance of educational leadership. The first source of evidence was their finding that studies of exceptional schools – both high- and low-performing ones – consistently show very large leadership effects; the caveat of this evidence is: The majority of these studies are qualitative in design and often lack external validity and are difficult to replicate for reliability. The second source of evidence came primarily from the consideration of large-scale quantitative studies of overall leadership impact that Leithwood et al. (2006) reported have been compellingly analyzed by Hallinger and Heck. These studies indicated a small but still quite significant effect for both direct and indirect leadership influence on student achievement; while classroom factors in these studies attributed for approximately 33% of student achievement differences, leadership explained between 5% and 7% of student achievement across schools. For instance, Holloway (2006) compellingly argued that the impact of professional development on student achievement is supported by the existing evidence. The third source of evidence supporting the effects of leadership came from studies considering specific leadership responsibilities. In cases where school leaders showed improvement across each leadership responsibility (one study identified 21 leadership responsibilities), student achievement was shown to increase by 10 percentile points on standardized measurements.
The fourth source of evidence for leadership effects was Leithwood et al.’s (2006) finding that transformational school leadership has a significant, positive effect on student engagement. Given that student engagement is generally held to positively impact student learning and achievement, the finding implies that transformational leadership may have a positive, if indirect, impact on student achievement. The fifth and final source of evidence clarified by Leithwood et al. (2006) was the finding that unplanned principal turnover had a profound and negative impact on school improvement efforts. This was true even in schools where instructional programs had been effective and the teachers were performing successfully. Identifying and maintaining talented leadership appears to play a major role in school improvement efforts.

Hallinger and Heck (2010) framed their leadership study by questioning a research bias that hypothesized school leadership as “the causal agent of change and driver of performance in organizations,” (p. 3). They implicated themselves in this bias, citing previous studies of theirs that had focused on a direct or presumed causal link that existed by basing mediated-effects studies on this assumption. In their 2010 study, Hallinger and Heck sought to consider the reciprocal effects of organizational constructs, including leadership, as they suspected that the interplay between key factors was dynamic and susceptible to evolution as the dynamics for and between factors were impacted by changing conditions and relationships. The specific research question they asked to investigate this problem was “how are changes in collaborative leadership, school capacity, and student learning related over time?” (Hallinger & Heck, p. 4). In terms of collaborative leadership, the researchers were specifically concentrated on within school leadership, rather than system-wide distributed
leadership. Further, they conceptualized leadership as an inherently collaborative process committed to improving student achievement.

They conducted research in 195 elementary schools in a single western state in the U.S. over a four-year study period to examine reciprocal and unidirectional effects of leadership and school improvement efforts within these schools. They reviewed student performance data for a cohort of 13,391 third grade students across these schools and collected demographic data for correlation. Annual survey data (for a total of three years during the four year research effort) for teachers and a random sample of parents were reviewed; the surveys had been used within the state for over a decade to track educational processes and conditions within the various schools and had been shown to indicate meaningful relationships between teachers’ responses in particular and aspects of school academic quality such as the commitment to achievement and the nature of instructional programming.

Hallinger and Heck’s (2010) research data indicated that collaborative leadership had both an impact on school instructional capacity that produced both direct and indirect effects on student achievement. However, they also reported that their hypothesis that collaborative leadership was directly responsive to changes in school improvement capacity (e.g. goals and curriculum) occurring over time was only partially supported by the data. The researchers concluded that these two unidirectional causal understandings were not fully explanatory of how leadership effects evolved as the system continued to change. The reciprocal model of effects that they employed provided a more comprehensive agreement and explanation of the relationships, indicating that initial levels of achievement were positively linked to subsequent changes in collaborative leadership and instructional improvement capacity. They further
found that there was reciprocity between collaborative leadership and instructional improvement capacity with each effecting growth changes in the other. Further, they determined that collaborative leadership steadily increased over time as an indirect result of changes in school improvement capacity and student improvement in math achievement. Finally, school improvement capacity efforts over time appeared to have a somewhat stronger impact in influencing collaborative leadership changes, than did leadership effects have on school improvement capacity over time. Hallinger and Heck concluded that collaborative leadership initially drove school improvement capacity and school achievement but that, subsequently, over time, this balance of influence may shift and collaborative leadership may be more strongly impacted by changes in school improvement capacity and student achievement. These findings, they argued, speak to the “dynamic and responsive nature of leadership for learning.” (Hallinger & Heck, 2010, p. 33).

**Conclusion**

While William Bennett’s use of the disdainful and dismissive epithet of “the blob” to describe district level educational leadership as an ineffective, even destructive, mass of dysfunction may have informed cultural sensibilities for a time, the substantial amount of empirically-supported research exploring the links between district level leadership and student achievement published in recent years, give lie to this quotable, but misguided, perception (Waters & Marzano, 2006). In fact there is a wealth of evidence that supports the contention that effective leadership is one of the most important factors predicting improvements in student achievement (Togneri & Anderson, 2003; Wahlstrom et al., 2010). As Leithwood et al. (2006) observed, leadership is second only to classroom instruction in terms of the impact on student learning and this is further evidenced by the literature showing
that superintendent and principal turnover have been traced to negative effects on student achievement (Waters & Marzano, 2006).

Given the evident importance of leadership to student learning, it is not surprising that much of the debate regarding school improvement is over how best to effect and support positive leadership for sustainable outcomes (Barker, 2008; Burch, 2007; Maleyko, 2011). The literature suggests that there is a movement away from traditional and hierarchical notions of leadership structure for schools, and growing in interest in collective, shared and distributed approaches to instructional reform leading to increased achievement (Bligh et al., 2006; Chrispeels et al., 2008; Ramalho et al., 2010; Marks & Nance, 2007; Miller & Rowan, 2006). Research on the benefits of distributed leadership approaches have been reported for studies focusing on superintendents (Bredeson & Kose, 2007; Murphy et al., 2007), principals (Harris et al., 2006; Lyons & Algozzine, 2006) and teachers (Edge & Mylopoulos, 2008; Firestone & Martinez, 2007). Even more significant are the reports that district-wide leadership initiatives that seek to engage stakeholders in the improvement decision making and planning process have been shown to have positive effects on student achievement (Hallinger & Heck, 2010; Jacobson, 2010; Leithwood et al., 2006; Taylor, 2010; Wahlstrom et al., 2010; Waters & Marzano, 2006).

While a consensus may be emerging as to the usefulness of statewide initiatives supporting distributed leadership across school districts, the issue is hardly settled. Some of the studies report mixed results and others note that in districts or schools where those who serve as educational leaders express resistance to such improvement efforts, initiatives may not be properly executed and may fail to improve instructional delivery and student learning (Budge, 2010; Robinson et al., 2009; Togneri & Anderson, 2003; Volante & Cherubini,
A variety of factors can impact the success of improvement initiatives including how effectively professional development is supported by school leaders and whether it is correctly aligned with educational goals (Holloway, 2006; van Lier, 2009; Wahlstrom et al., 2010). Districts’ and schools’ openness to collecting and using performance data for accountability and as a tool for identifying areas of improvement and suggesting directions for instructional changes is also critical (Geijsel et al., 2010; MacBeath, 2008; Wang et al., 2006).

The Ohio Improvement Process is in its early stages of implementation in Ohio and there is little empirical research on the impact of the initiative on school improvement (Lloyd et al., 2009). Van Lier (2009) reported that while many early adopters have been supportive of the effort and report benefits associated with the leadership effort, other schools and districts have been less enthusiastic, seeing the OIP as yet another system that requires administrators and staff to duplicate similar efforts already in place.

Additional research is needed to explore the ongoing impact of the OIP initiative and to determine whether OIP is having the intended improvement effects on student progress and achievement. This study is designed to explore and investigate the latter and contribute meaningfully to the consideration of these issues.
CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Chapter III outlines the research methods used in testing research questions presented in Chapter I. Chapter III describes the purpose and overview of the research study, restates the research questions, highlights the research design and the participants involved, provides an overview of the survey questionnaire deployed to gather data, explains how the data were collected and analyzed, and describes the data analysis procedures.

Purpose and Overview of the Study

The purpose of this study was to consider the impact of a school leadership led strategic planning framework, the Ohio Improvement Process (OIP), on Local Report Card (LRC) designations. LRC ratings are: 1) Excellent with Distinction; 2) Excellent; 3) Effective; 4) Continuous Improvement; 5) Academic Watch, and 6) Academic Emergency.

Local Report Card (LRC) ratings denote overall student progress and achievement in Ohio school districts using multiple measures of performance: i.e., State Indicators, Performance Index, Adequate Yearly Progress, and Value Added Calculations (Appendix E).

Further this study sought to understand if the stage of implementation within the Ohio Improvement Process impacts student progress and achievement as reported on Local Report Cards in Ohio public school districts. The Ohio Improvement Process has four stages: 1) Identifying Critical Needs of the District; 2) Developing a Focused Plan; 3) Implementing the Focused Plan, and 4) Monitoring the Improvement Process.

Research Design

This quantitative study utilized a causal-comparative research design to explore differences between Local Report Card (LRC) ratings of Ohio public school districts and the stage of implementation of a strategic planning framework known as the Ohio Improvement
Process developed by the Ohio Leadership Advisory Council (OLAC). Causal-comparative research design is appropriate because the research examined, whether the causes of differences that existed between LRC groups were based on OIP implementation (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006). The research further examined if there are variations in levels of participation in the OIP by school district leadership and/or their designees and district stakeholders. The study acquired data based on superintendent and/or superintendent designees’ individual realities regarding the Ohio Improvement Process in their respective school districts. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to provide the foundation of data for review and reporting purposes.

**Participants**

This study requested the participation of Ohio public school superintendents or their designees \( n = 613 \) to answer a 14-item survey questionnaire. The survey questionnaire asked the superintendent or designee for information regarding their district’s Ohio Improvement Process (OIP) involvement and their Local Report Card (LRC) ratings for school year 2011 – 2012. Further the questionnaire inquired about their (superintendents or superintendent designee) perceived benefits of the OIP as well as personal and district demographic data. Superintendents or appointed designees were targeted as respondents for this study as they are their respective school district’s foremost instructional leaders. All Ohio public school systems were asked to participate regardless of Local Report Card ratings, school size, school district typology, average daily membership (ADM), or superintendent or designee tenure. The survey was deployed from the researcher to the participants via an online survey company, Survey Monkey.
A cover letter (Appendix B) to participants sent via electronic mail, embedded with the Survey Monkey link, highlighted that informed consent for participation would take place when the respondent clicked on the live survey link. Survey Monkey automatically calculated the participant survey results in real time. Data were tracked as they were collected.

A contact number and email address for the Human Subjects Review Board and Dr. Patrick Pauken, doctoral advisor, at Bowling Green State University was included in the survey cover letter. Thus any superintendent or respondent receiving the Ohio Improvement Process Involvement Survey (OIPIS) could have contacted the university if they had questions or concerns regarding the OIPIS survey. The researcher’s contact information was supplied when the electronic mail was sent via mail merge as well as being posted in the cover letter.

The risks associated with this study were no greater than those experienced in everyday life. Responses were kept anonymous and were reported in aggregate form only. No single district or administrator was identifiable in the study via the data reported. The questionnaire possessed a limited opportunity for respondents to elucidate their responses and provide additional thoughts and insight. Although limited, the amount of survey detail requested adequately answered the study’s research questions. In addition, some respondents provided additional feedback via personal emails to the researcher.

**Instrumentation**

A researcher-constructed 14-item survey questionnaire containing a set of items to adequately answer four research questions was used as the mode of data collection for this study. A survey enabled the researcher to obtain data about practices, situations, and views of the respondents at one point in time. Using the responses provided data was analyzed to draw
inferences regarding any existing causal relationship between the independent variable, Ohio Improvement Process, and the dependent variable, Local Report Card ratings.

The questionnaire was titled the Ohio Improvement Process Involvement Survey (OIPIS) (Appendix C). Although a previously developed survey may have been appropriate there were none available due to the infancy of the OIP process and its unmandated implementation status across the State of Ohio in all public school districts. Developing a new instrument was the best option for gathering needed data to complete the study.

Demographic data regarding the tenure of the district’s point of contact and involvement in the OIP were identified in questions, one, two, and three. Item four requested each reporting district’s typology as defined by the Ohio Department of Education for school year 2011-2012. The fifth item requested each district’s Local Report Card designation as reported by the Ohio Department of Education also for school year 2011 – 2012. The responses for item five, Local Report Card rating, ranged from (1) Excellent with Distinction to (6) Academic Emergency. Item six asked respondents to report in which of four OIP stages their district is currently involved. Use of the OIP Framework, titled *Facilitator Activities by Stage*, served as a foundational tool for developing item six regarding OIP implementation stages. Item seven identified the inception of OIP involvement in terms of “year began” by reporting districts. Item eight explored to a more exact degree the commitment of each district per the specific OIP stages to determine how districts are moving through the OIP format and at what pace. Items nine thru twelve clarified the superintendent or superintendent’s designee’s perceptions and value of the OIP process applying a 4-point Likert Scale ranging from (1) Strongly Agree to (4) Strongly Disagree. Item 13 questioned if involvement of district leadership is essential for strategic planning to be successful in district
leadership’s opinion. The final question served to answer if the Ohio Improvement Process was used to exclusion or in tandem with other strategic planning frameworks that are available for use in Ohio school districts. Once the survey was developed, the next step was to have experts examine the survey for unclear terminology, misleading questions, or ambiguous statements. Through this process content validity was established.

The first level of readers were two volunteers who had no previous exposure to OIP although they had heard of the process. Their input was requested per the readability piece and to understand if the survey made sense even to those not overly familiar with the Ohio Improvement Process. A second level of administrative experts, previously or currently involved with OIP via their respective districts, were then solicited to review the OIPIS Questionnaire. These panel members were a school district superintendent, a member of the Erie-Huron-Ottawa County Educational Service Center, and the Region II State Support Team. In addition to a review of terminology, ambiguity, format, and clarity these experts also reviewed the directions and procedures as well as the time commitment for respondents taking the Ohio Improvement Process Involvement Survey (OIPIS).

A final pilot test of the survey was conducted in Survey Monkey using school leaders from Norwalk City Schools due to convenience and availability as well as their expert knowledge of OIP. The pilot test did not necessitate changes. Experts reviewing the survey were not a part of the population or statistics collected, reported, and analyzed via Survey Monkey and in SPSS for this study. Feedback experts noted the length and time commitment to complete the survey was beneficial and could possibly result in an increased rate of participation by superintendents or designees.
The OIPIS was distributed via electronic mail. A cover letter with the Bowling Green State University letterhead, a brief introduction of the researcher, a note of the time commitment for survey completion, and succinct overview of the data collection was included. A live link to Survey Monkey, noting the desired survey completion date, was also embedded in the cover letter to ensure ease of data reporting for school personnel with issues of time compression. Survey completion time ranged from five to seven minutes by the participating superintendents or school district leadership designees. The researcher anticipated the survey questions would adequately supply the needed foundational information necessary for data collection and analyzing answers the research questions posed.

Survey items 9 to 13 (which asked respondent’s opinion) were tested for reliability. The alpha coefficient for these items was .850. This suggests that items have relatively high internal consistency. A reliability coefficient of .70 was used as this is considered “acceptable” in most social science situations (Analyzing Data in SPSS, Indiana University).

**Procedures**

To gather data for this causal-comparative study the researcher used an online electronically deployed survey. The steps to deployment of the survey are noted below.

1. Contacted the Ohio Department of Education for public school district superintendent’s electronic mailing addresses in October 2012. Steps provided via ODE to eliminate the superintendents of charter or non-public schools were followed creating a list-serve of only public school superintendents.

2. Spoke with educational professionals not previously involved with the OIP planning process and asked they read the researcher constructed – dissertation
committee approved OIPIS Inventory and cover letter the week of October 22, 2012. This review was to determine readability and clarity of questions.

3. Requested expert OIP trained facilitators or participants to review the OIPIS Inventory the week of October 29, 2012 with a task completion date of November 2, 2012. This review was to check terminology, clarity, format, directions, procedures and the amount of time the survey was perceived to take for completion. Reflections were positive and no corrections and revisions were necessary to the OIPIS after being read by OIP facilitators or participants.

4. Entered the OIPIS Inventory was to a Survey Monkey Gold format the week of November 12, 2012. The entry was reviewed by a technology expert that is familiar with the Survey Monkey protocol. Formatting suggestions were shared and implemented. A live link was created for the OIPIS Questionnaire and was embedded into the OIPIS cover letter.

5. Tested the live link in the Survey Monkey cover letter (Appendix B) the week of November 12, 2013. Two additional email addresses were entered by hand for the testing process. A district superintendent, an assistant superintendent, and teacher leader took the actual OIPIS Inventory in Survey Monkey. These results were not reported as a part of the collected data for this study. A test was also run on the mail merge processes using an email address from the list obtained from the Ohio Department of Education.

6. Emailed the final personalized surveys addressed to the title and name of each superintendent on Wednesday, November 28, 2012 with a requested completion date of December 7, 2012 noted. Inventory data was gathered in real time as
respondents completed the OIPIS. The survey cover letter and the final survey question explicitly stated that no data would be reported in a disaggregated manner. All data would be aggregated and confidential.

7. Forwarded an electronic reminder regarding survey completion on Wednesday, December 5, 2012. The completion date noted on the reminder was December 12, 2012. This mailing again thanked those that had participated in the OIP and further asked for participation of the remaining districts not yet reporting.

8. Closed the participation window for the OIPIS Questionnaire on December 12, 2012. Data reported from each district superintendent or district designee was exported to an Excel Spreadsheet.

An electronic survey process was selected due to the magnitude of personally contacting district leaders. Respect of district leaders with time compression issues of their own was also considered. The electronic survey permitted appropriate attention and time to the survey determined by individual convenience. Each respondent showed a desire to participate by completing the OIPIS Questionnaire. In order to encourage a positive response from superintendents or designees all survey responses were kept confidential as noted in the survey cover letter requesting district leadership participation. All participants were asked to answer each question as honestly and accurately as possible to the best of their knowledge. When noted, via the submission of an email address on Item 15, the researcher will provide follow-up information with regards to the OIPIS survey results. Data gathered was automatically calculated in Survey Monkey as respondents completed the inventory. The data set was downloaded from a Survey Monkey to an Excel Spreadsheet and into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) for quantitative analysis.
Research Questions

The present study sought to answer four questions:

1. What is the degree of Ohio’s public school district’s implementation of the Ohio Improvement Process?
2. Do Local Report Card ratings differ by the level of commitment of the Ohio Improvement Process?
3. Do Local Report Card ratings differ by the degree of implementation of the Ohio Improvement Process?
4. To what degree do Ohio school district superintendents value the Ohio Improvement Process?

Data Analysis

Using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze the data gathered from respondent’s answers to the researcher constructed Ohio Improvement Process Involvement Survey electronically deployed via Survey Monkey. The implementation stage of the Ohio Improvement Process (question 6) was the primary independent variable and has five categories: 1) We have not yet begun the Ohio Improvement Process; 2) Stage 1 = Identifying Critical Needs; 3) Stage 2 = Develop a Focused Plan; 4) Stage 3 = Implement and Monitor a Focused Plan and; 5) Stage 4 = Evaluate the Improvement Process (Ohio Improvement Process, 2010). The independent variable is ordinal.

The primary dependent variable, Local Report Card rating (question 5) has six levels: 1) Excellent with Distinction; 2) Excellent 3) Effective 4) Continuous Improvement; 5) Academic Watch or; 6) Academic Emergency as reported on Local District Report cards.
(Ohio Department of Education, 2002). Although this variable utilizes an ordinal scale, for purposes of analysis this variable was treated as interval/ratio. Continuous variables can take on numerical values where there are equal units of measurement between numerical values (Basics of Measurement, n.d.). It is understood the distance between each LRC rating is of equal distance.

As previously noted data downloaded via Survey Monkey was reported on an Excel Spreadsheet and then analyzed in SPSS. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze research questions one and four. Inferential statistics were used to analyze research questions two and three. To test the similarities or differences between groups, research questions two and three were analyzed using a one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). ANOVA examined group differences in the level of commitment to the OIP process and OIP Implementation Stage on Local Report Card ratings. Prior to running the ANOVA a histogram was run on the continuous dependent viable, Local Report Card ratings to inspect the distribution of the data collected. The histogram showed the data reported for report card ratings were significantly positively skewed. This determined that in addition to the parametric test, ANOVA, it would also be necessary to run a non-parametric test the Kruskal-Wallis. When analyzed data showed significance a Mann Whitney \( U \) was run on all pairs of the data to determine which groups differed significantly. Results of both inferential testing procedures (ANOVA and Kruskal-Wallis) have been reported in this research. ANOVA is robust to violation but the Kruskal-Wallis was also run to render additional statistical measures showing strength to the overall data analysis.

A graphic representation of the research questions, variables, and data analysis techniques that were used to gather data for this study are illustrated in Table 1. Descriptive
statistics were used to analyze and report data findings for items one, two, three, four, thirteen and fourteen of the OIPIS Questionnaire.

**Summary**

Chapter III presents the research methodology used for this study. The purpose of the study was discussed. The four research questions and research design were presented. Study participants were selected on the basis of their leadership position in Ohio school districts. Responding participants answered a 14-item survey which contained questions of fact and opinion. Descriptive and inferential statistics were run on the collected data exploring the relationship between Local Report Card ratings and the stages of implementation in the Ohio Improvement Process.
Table 1

*Research Questions, Variables, and Data Analysis Techniques*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Data Analysis Techniques</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. What is the degree of Ohio’s public school district’s implementation of the Ohio Improvement Process?</td>
<td>Survey items numbered # 6, # 7, and # 8</td>
<td>Descriptive</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 2. Do Local Report Card ratings differ by level of commitment to the Ohio Improvement Process? | IV = Commitment to OIP Process  
Group 1 – Not Started, Stage 1 active or stalled, Stage 2 active or stalled, Stage 3 active or stalled, Stage 4 active or stalled, Completed, item # 8  
Group 2 - Not Started, Started but Stalled, Currently Active or Completed, item # 8  
DV = LRC (continuous), item # 5 | ANOVA  
Kruskal-Wallis  
ANOVA  
Kruskal-Wallis  
Mann Whitney U |
| 3. Do Local Report Card ratings differ by the degree of implementation of the Ohio Improvement Process? | IV = OIP Implementation Stage (0-4), item # 6  
DV = LRC (continuous), item # 5 | ANOVA  
Kruskal-Wallis |
| 4. To what degree do Ohio school district superintendents value the Ohio Improvement Process? | Survey items numbered # 9, # 10, # 11, and # 12 | Descriptive |
CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

Introduction

This qualitative causal-comparative study examined the impact of an educational strategic planning framework, the Ohio Improvement Process (OIP – Independent Variable), written by the Ohio Leadership Advisory Council (OLAC), on student progress and achievement. Student progress and achievement was measured via the use of Ohio school district’s Local Report Card (LRC – Dependent Variable) ratings.

Chapter IV presents statistical results, using methodologies outlined in Chapter III to investigate four research questions. Statistics were gathered from responses via school district superintendents or their designees when answering the electronically deployed Ohio Improvement Process Involvement Survey (OIPIS).

All submitted survey data were tabulated via Survey Monkey as superintendents or designees responded. Once the collection of data was completed and the survey was closed all responses were imported to an Excel Spreadsheet via Survey Monkey. The data collected were then organized and analyzed by frequency distributions, descriptive statistics, and inferential statistics using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

The balance of Chapter IV will report the statistical analysis of the data gathered from this causal-comparative study. The chapter will be organized in terms of the four specific research questions as posed in Chapter I and restated in Chapter III.

Descriptive Statistics

Overall 205 (34%) of public schools district leaders completed the OIPIS Questionnaire. The greatest numbers of respondents to the OIPIS Questionnaire were district superintendents (n = 148, 72%). Superintendent participation was followed by participants
having the district title of Director \((n = 31, 15\%)\) (see Table 2). Combined, those with the title of Director and Superintendent accounted for 87% of all respondents. Of those reporting, almost half have been in their current school leadership position for four years or more years \((n = 97, 47\%)\) (see Table 3). By contrast, 34% of respondents have been with their current districts for two years or less. Of the district leaders answering the OIPIS, 54% have served as the OIP point of contact for their district for the last three or four years \((n = 110, 54\%)\) (see Table 4).

Table 2

*Frequencies and Percentages for Job Titles*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Designated Job Title</th>
<th>(n)</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Superintendent</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Superintendent</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building level administrator</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher leader</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3

*Frequencies and Percentages for Length of Employment in Current Position*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Length of Employment</th>
<th>(n)</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 1 year</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 or 2 years</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 or 4 years</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 4 years</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4

*Frequencies and Percentages for Length of Service as the District Point of Contact or Facilitator for OIP*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Length of Service</th>
<th>(n)</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 1 year</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 or 2 years</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 or 4 years</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
School district typologies are designated by the Ohio Department of Education. All typologies had reporting district leaders except one, Island District or College Corner. The greatest number of reporting districts were in the Rural/small town, moderate to median income group \((n = 70, 34\%)\). In Ohio this typology, Rural/small town accounts for 87% of all districts. The second highest typology group reporting was that of Rural/high poverty and a low to median income \((n = 42, 20\%)\), which account for 43% across the State of Ohio. All totaled rural schools were noted to have 141 participants for a total of 69% of all responding districts (see Tables 5 and 6).

Table 5

*Frequencies and Percentages for Typology of School District as Noted by ODE*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District Typology</th>
<th>( n )</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Island District, College Corner</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural, high poverty, low median income</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural, small student population, low poverty, low to median income</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural/small town, moderate to median income</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major urban, very high poverty</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban, low median income, high poverty</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban/suburban, high median income</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban/suburban, very high median income, very low poverty</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 6

*School District Typology as Reported by ODE- March 2013*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District Typology</th>
<th>Number of districts in typology</th>
<th>n= responding districts</th>
<th>% of responding districts per typology</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Island District, College Corner</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural, high poverty, low median income</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural, small student population, low poverty, low to median income</td>
<td>161</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural/small town, moderate to median income</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major urban, very high poverty</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban, low median income, high poverty</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban/suburban, high median income</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban/suburban, very high median income, very low poverty</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The majority OIPIS of participants (n = 153, 75%) thought district level leadership’s participation was essential for the successful implementation of a strategic planning framework. Many of the participants either use only the OIP strategic planning framework (n = 88, 43%) or use the OIP framework in conjunction with another strategic planning strategy (n = 72, 35%).

On the OIPIS Questionnaire item 5 asked for participants for their district’s current Local Report Card rating using the following: 1) Excellent with Distinction; 2) Excellent; 3) Effective; 4) Continuous Improvement; 5) Academic Watch; and 6) Academic Emergency. This listing was used as this is the manner in which the Ohio Department of Education reports LRC ratings. This method of listing LRC would be familiar to respondents.

However, for ease of use in the analysis phase of this work item 5 was recoded to reflect the following: 1) Academic Emergency; 2) Academic Watch; 3) Continuous Improvement; 4) Effective; 5) Excellent; and 6) Excellent with Distinction. Recoding
would have the highest level of achievement by a district correlate to the highest number. The district report card designation of Excellent ($n = 76, 37\%$) was the most highly reported rating by district respondents. This was followed by the Effective designation at ($n = 56, 27\%$).

Via statistical analysis the average response for LRC rating was calculated at $4.76 (SD = 1.02)$. This confirms most participants reported their district report card ratings were either Effective (4) or Excellent (5) on Local Report Card ratings in school year 2011-2012 (see Table 7).

Table 7

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School District Report Card Ratings 2010 – 2011 and Districts Responding to OIPIS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local Report Card Rating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excellent w/Distinction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excellent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuous Improvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Watch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Emergency</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The Ohio Department of Education released partial LRC reports the week of February 25, 2013 for school year 2011 - 2012. The overall state statistics were not available when this chart was generated March 4, 2013. The scores from the state reflect data from 2010 – 2011. The LRC reported by respondents is from school year 2011 – 2012.

Research Question One

What is the degree of Ohio’s public school district’s implementation of the Ohio Improvement Process?

To assess Research Question One, descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) were calculated from the data collected from the OIPIS Questionnaire using items 6 – 8. Item
6 asked participants: “In what stage of the Ohio Improvement Process framework is your district currently engaged?” The most common response was Stage 4: Monitoring the Improvement Process ($n = 72, 35\%$) followed by Stage 3: Implementing a Focused Plan ($n = 55, 27\%$) (see Table 8). Participants were also asked: “In what school year did your district began in the Ohio Improvement Process?” Many of the participants started the OIP process in the 2009-2010 school year ($n = 76, 37\%$) followed by the 2010-2011 school year ($n = 42, 21\%$) (see Table 9). Respondents were asked to describe their level of commitment to the OIP during the 2011-2012 school year. The most-common response was “We have moved through all OIP stages and are revisiting our goals, mission, and vision” ($n = 36, 18\%$) (see Table 8) followed by “We began work in Stage 1 and have moved into Stage 2” ($n = 21, 10\%$). Descriptive statistics for items 5 – 8 are presented in Tables 8 through 10.

Table 8

*Frequencies and Percentages for OIP Stages of Implementation*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage of OIP Implementation</th>
<th>$n$</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not yet begun OIP Process</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 1: Identify Critical Needs</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 2: Developing a Focused Plan</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 3: Implementing a Focused Plan</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 4: Monitoring the Improvement Process</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 9

*Frequencies and Percentages for Year District Began the OIP*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year OIP Began in District</th>
<th>$n$</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2011 – 2012</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010 – 2011</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009 - 2010</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008- 2009</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 10

Frequencies and Percentages for OIP Commitment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Commitment to OIP During School Year 2011 0-2012</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Began in Stage 1 and remained there for a year (Stalled)</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Began in Stage 1 and moved to Stage 2 (Active)</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Began in Stage 1 and moved to Stage 2 and 3 (Active)</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Began in Stage 1 and moved to Stage 2, 3, and 4 (Active)</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Began in Stage 2 and remained there for the school year (Stalled)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Began in Stage 2 and moved to Stage 3 (Active)</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Began in Stage 2 and moved to stage 3 and 4 (Active)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Began in Stage 3 and remained there for the school year (Stalled)</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Began in Stage 3 and moved to Stage 4 (Active)</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Began in Stage 4 and remained there for the year (Stalled)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moved through all stages of the OIP (Completed)</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing (Not started)</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Research Question Two

Do Local Report Card ratings differ by level of commitment to the Ohio Improvement Process among Ohio Schools?

Descriptive statistics were calculated for the variables. The assumption of normality was assessed with a histogram of scores (see Figure 2) regarding Local Report Card ratings, the dependent variable. The histogram showed LRC data to be substantially, positively skewed, indicating a violation of normality. To address the violation of normality the Kruskal-Wallis test, the non-parametric equivalent of the ANOVA, was also conducted on data even though an ANOVA is robust to violation. In the non-parametric Kruskal-Wallis test the scores are analyzed independently and are not reliant on one another and provides additional strength to statistical results.
Research question two was analyzed by grouping respondent answers in two different ways. The first grouping examined if the Local Report Card rating (survey item 5) was significantly different by level of commitment (survey item 8) with the following categories: 1) Not Started; 2) Began Stage 1 - active or stalled; 3) Began Stage 2 - active or stalled; 4) Began Stage 3 - active or stalled; 5) Began Stage 4 - active or stalled; or 6) if the OIP framework had been Completed (see Table 11).
Table 11

Descriptive Statistics of Local Report Card Rating by Level of Commitment (Group 1)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>(N)</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Mean Rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not started</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>5.04</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td>118.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 1 (active and stalled)</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>4.73</td>
<td>1.13</td>
<td>102.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 2 (active and stalled)</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4.70</td>
<td>0.98</td>
<td>97.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 3 (active and stalled)</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4.77</td>
<td>1.14</td>
<td>105.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 4 (active and stalled)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.40</td>
<td>1.73</td>
<td>83.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completed</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>4.56</td>
<td>0.93</td>
<td>89.32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In contrast, the second grouping utilized the following categories for level of commitment (survey item 8): 1) Not Started; 2) Started but Stalled; 3) Currently Active: 4) or having Completed the OIP framework (see Table 12).

Table 12

Descriptive Statistics of Local Report Card Rating by Level of Commitment (Group 2)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>(N)</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Mean Rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not started (^{ab})</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>5.04</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td>118.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Started but stalled (^{a}) (stalled groups only)</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>4.44</td>
<td>1.23</td>
<td>88.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Currently active (^{b})  (active groups only)</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>4.81</td>
<td>1.03</td>
<td>106.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completed (^{b})</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>4.56</td>
<td>0.94</td>
<td>89.32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{a} U = 612.50, p = .012 \quad ^{b} U = 550.50, p = .009\)

These groupings are different because the first group defines the work in OIP within stages while considering “Not Started”, “Active” or “Stalled”. The second grouping is less refined and simply gives an overall picture and categorizes respondent answers by “Not Started”, “Stalled”, “Active” or “Completed” and does not consider specific stages within the OIP framework.

The mean and the mean rank of the “Not started” OIP reporting group is the highest in both data are groupings analyzed for Research Question 2. When the “Not Started” respondents are removed Stage 3 respondents have the highest mean and mean rank by level.
of commitment when “Active” and “Stalled” are analyzed within the stages of OIP. The second group analysis shows that, aside from the “Not started” group, the school districts that are “Currently Active” without reference to a specific stage in the OIP have the highest mean and mean rank as report on Local Report Card ratings.

For Research Question 2, the first grouping of data (see Table 11), One-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) and the Kruskal-Wallis were run with each grouping configuration for the independent variable. ANOVA results indicated that Local Report Card ratings did not significantly differ across the six stages of OIP (\(F(5,199) = 1.29, \ p = .271\)). Ensuring an accurate and valid interpretation of mean differences, the Levene’s test of homogeneity, also showed no statistically significant variances among groups (\(F (5,199) = 2.03, \ p = .076\)). Kruskal-Wallis results indicate no significant difference in mean ranks; \(x^2(5) = 6.90, \ p = .228\).

As previously noted: the second comparison utilized four categories when analyzing the level of OIP commitment: 1) Not started; 2) Started but stalled; 3) Currently active or; 4) Completed. ANOVA results showed that Local Report Card ratings did significantly differ by level of commitment; \(F(3,201) = 3.53, \ p = .016\). Scheffe Post Hoc revealed the “Not Started” group was significantly higher than the “Stalled” and “Completed” groups (see Table 12). A Kruskal-Wallis test was conducted to evaluate differences in mean ranks among the levels of commitment to the OIP. The result of the Kruskal-Wallis indicates there is a significant difference in the mean ranks \(x^2(3) = 9.22, \ p = .027\).

The Kruskal-Wallis test was significant when the second grouping of data was analyzed indicating differences in the current report card ratings by level of commitment of Ohio school districts to the OIP process. Therefore, Mann Whitney \(U\) tests were conducted on all pairs to determine which groups significantly differed. The test between “Not Started”
and “Stalled” was significant; $U = 612.50, p = .012$, indicating the mean rank was significantly higher for the “Not Started” group than it was for those who have “Stalled”.

Further, the test between “Not Started” and “Completed” was significant, $U = 550.50, p = .009$, indicating the mean rank was significantly higher for the “Not Started” group than it was for the “Completed” group.

**Research Question Three**

Does the Local Report Card rating differ by degree of implementation of OIP among Ohio’s public school districts?

To assess Research Question 3, an analysis of variance (ANOVA) and Kruskal-Wallis were conducted to examine if the Local Report Card rating (survey item 5) was significantly different by the degree of implementation (survey item 6) of the Ohio Improvement Process (Stages 1 - 4). Descriptive statistics were again generated for the studied variables (see Table 13). Data once again shows the mean and the mean rank of the “Not Started” group to be the highest, albeit not significantly higher. But once the “Not Started” group is removed the districts in Stage 4 of the OIP have a slightly higher mean and mean rank than does the second highest group Stage 3. This signifies that the further along in the OIP process the better LRC ratings will be although not statically significant.

Table 13

**Assess Differences on Local Report Card Rating by Degree of Implementation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Mean Rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Have not begun OIP process</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>5.09</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>120.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4.50</td>
<td>1.31</td>
<td>88.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 2</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>4.48</td>
<td>1.30</td>
<td>91.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 3</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>4.70</td>
<td>1.03</td>
<td>98.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 4</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>4.72</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>100.61</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ANOVA results indicate no differences in the Local Report Card ratings by the degree of implementation of the Ohio Improvement Process strategic planning framework; $F(4,200) = 1.88, p = .116$. A Kruskal-Wallis conducted to evaluate the differences in mean ranks among the degrees of implementation of OIP among Ohio school districts indicates there is no significant difference in the mean ranks; $x^2(4) = 6.270, p = .180$.

**Research Question Four**

To what degree do Ohio school district superintendents value OIP?

To assess Research Question 4, descriptive statistics were calculated from the data collected on survey items 9 - 12. Survey item nine asked, “In your opinion, has the implementation of the Ohio Improvement Process, increased district dialogue between administration, teaching staff, and other district leadership serving on the District Level Team?” In response to survey item nine, the majority of participants indicated they agree ($n = 99, 63$%), followed by the second most frequently endorsed response of strongly agree ($n = 46, 29$%). Respondents were also asked, “In your opinion, has the Ohio Improvement Process increased instructional leadership of the central office and building level administration in your district?” The majority of participants indicated they agree ($n = 105, 67$%), followed by strongly agree ($n = 33, 21$%) as the second most frequently endorsed response that OIP has increased instructional leadership. Participant responses to survey items 9 and 10 are presented in Table 14.

Also asked of respondents was, “Has the use of District Level Teams (DLT) helped district leadership introduce current Ohio Department of Education initiatives such as Data Dissection, the Model Curriculum, Standards Revisions, Common Core State Standards, Formative Assessments, The Third Grade Guarantee, Student Learning Objectives, new
Evaluation Processes, and the Next Generation Assessments in your district?”  The majority of participants indicated they agree \((n = 98, 61\%)\) followed by strongly agree \((n = 38, 24\%)\) that OIP has helped with the introduction of new state initiatives. And finally, respondents were asked, “Has/will the implementation of the Ohio Improvement Process increase progress and achievement of students in your district?”  Again the majority of the participants selected agree \((n = 108, 68\%)\) followed by strongly agree \((n = 25, 16\%)\) that OIP has increased student progress and achievement. Participants’ responses to survey items 11 and 12 are presented in Table 14.

Table 14

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey Items 9 to 12</th>
<th>(n)</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Item 9 - increased district dialogue</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 10 – increased instructional leadership</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 11 – helped introduction of initiatives</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 12 - increased student progress/achievement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Ancillary Analysis

Participants answered survey item 14, which questioned, “Is your district using another strategic planning framework other than or in conjunction with the OIP?” In response to this survey item, many participants indicated “We use only the Ohio Improvement Process strategic planning framework” (n = 88, 43%). Further, only 23 (11%) participants stated “We do not use a strategic planning framework in our district.” Of the remaining responses, 72 individuals indicated, “We use the OIP framework in conjunction with another strategy.” Of those 72 (35%) responses, 9 district leaders indicated they also used Race to the Top for strategic planning. Other responses included planning frameworks developed by the Ohio School Boards Association (OSBA), High Schools that Work (HSTW), Turnaround, Marzano, our own district “Work Plan”, focused School-State Diagnostic Teams, our own District Strategic Plan, Baldridge Framework for Performance Excellence, and AdvanceED.
Only 22 participants noted, “We do not use the OIP but use another strategic planning program.” Of those participants, 4 stated they use Race to the Top. Other responses included a Professional Learning Communities (PLC) Model, Quality Tools through Honda, locally developed processes, use of internal measures, homegrown processes, district specific processes, and the Academic Improvement Model. Additionally, one respondent indicated they use the Ohio Improvement Process but are not required to do so. Thus their district does not strictly follow the OIP format. Clearly many Ohio public school districts follow the OIP strategic framework. However, the Ohio Improvement Process is not the only strategic planning practice in use in State of Ohio public school districts.

**Summary**

The purpose of this research was to examine the relationship of the relatively new Ohio Improvement Process, a strategic planning framework, written by the Ohio Leadership Advisory Council on Local Report Card ratings in Ohio public school districts. Chapter V offers a more detailed presentation of the data while answering the four research questions. Research will be further summarized while drawing conclusions, reporting implications, and citing the foundations for further research.

Data reported to answer Research Question 1 shows that the greatest numbers of respondents were school district superintendents. Almost 50% of respondents have been in their current positions for more than four years. The Local Report Card rating of school districts was analyzed three different ways with a level of commitment and degree of implementation being reviewed. Dependent on how data were grouped there was statistical significance by degree of commitment to the OIP but the same could not be said of the stages of implementation. And finally, data overwhelmingly reports that school district leaders
believe OIP has increased dialogue among stakeholders, has promoted instructional leadership practices, has helped when introducing new state initiatives and impacts student progress and achievement (see Table 15).

Table 15

*Research Questions and Bulleted Results*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question(s)</th>
<th>Results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1. What is the degree of Ohio’s public school district’s implementation of the Ohio Improvement Process? | • Most districts reporting had an LRC rating of Effective or Excellent  
• Most districts utilizing the OIP framework were in stage 4 of the process  
• 37% of district began the OIP in 2008-2009 |
| 2. Do the Local Report Card ratings differ by level of commitment to the Ohio Improvement Process? | • When grouped in the OIP stages considering active or stalled there is no significant difference by level of commitment  
• When grouped as active or stalled not considering the OIP Stages there is a significant difference noted by level of commitment |
| 3. Do Local Report Card ratings differ by the degree of implementation of the Ohio Improvement Process? | • There is no statistically significant difference by degree of implementation of the Ohio Improvement Process on Local Report Card ratings |
| 4. To what degree do Ohio school district superintendents value the Ohio Improvement Process? | • District leadership agrees that OIP has increased district dialogue  
• District leadership agrees that OIP has increased instructional leadership  
• District leadership agrees that OIP has helped with the introduction of new educational initiatives  
• District leadership agrees that OIP has increased progress and achievement in their school district |
CHAPTER V: SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

Introduction

As an aid to the reader, the final chapter of this dissertation provides an overview of the work contained within the four previous chapters. Procedures employed to collect data regarding the research questions will be shared first. The procedures will be followed by discussion that will aid the reader in understanding why leadership matters in the plight to increase student progress and achievement. The importance of increasing achievement for the greater good in society is also noted. With this research-based foundation of knowledge, the reader will then be presented a discussion of the four research questions using data gathered and analyzed via The Ohio Improvement Process Involvement Survey (OIPIS) Questionnaire. The OIPIS effectively answered the questions explored and related the results to why leadership and student achievement matter. Chapter five will conclude with implications for educators, foundations for additional research and a conclusion.

Review of the Study

The present study employed a quantitative causal-comparative research format to explore differences in the stage of implementation of the Ohio Improvement Process (IV) (as reported by school district leadership) to publicly disseminated Local Report Card ratings (DV) as reported by the State of Ohio.

Legally mandated, Ohio school districts report their goal setting efforts each year via their Comprehensive Continuous Improvement Plans (CCIP). Yet the CCIP is not a leadership-led comprehensive planning framework that dissect all parts of a school district’s operation to identify antecedents of success for future replication. The OIP, not currently mandated for use in all Ohio districts, does employ a leadership led research-based strategic
planning format. When deployed with fidelity the OIP will allow districts to monitor and replicate successes. The OIP offers districts a structured approach to begin to collaboratively explore effect data and link it with cause(s) (Ohio Leadership.org). Reeves (2002) developed the L2 Matrix (see Figure 1) as an aid in conducting cause-effect analysis when using the OIP. Knowing the impact of OIP on LRC is of great importance. Participation in the implementation stages of the Ohio Improvement Process (OIP) was unknown when this work commenced. Hence comparing the effect of OIP on LRC has added to the foundation of knowledge.

To gather data, the researcher constructed survey, OIPIS, was electronically mailed to 600+ Ohio public school superintendents. A researcher constructed survey was used due to the infancy of the OIP and the lack of any existing surveys that would adequately answer the four proposed research questions. The survey respected time compression issues of school leaders but allowed the researcher to obtain data about district demographics, OIP practices (commitment to and implementation of), and district leader’s points of view on the use of OIP at one point in time. Using the data collected and analyzed, the researcher drew inferences regarding the existing relationship of OIP’s impact on LRC ratings ultimately highlighting a school’s publicly shared progress and achievement.

As previously noted, the primary reason this research was conducted was to better understand the commitment impact and degree of implementation of the Ohio Improvement Process framework on Local Report Card ratings. This relationship serves to show the importance of leadership led strategic planning via the OIP. Identification of educational leaders and participation from all levels of leadership is critical (Ohio Leadership Advisory Council non-negotiables, n.d.; Waters & Marzano, 2006). District leadership via a shared
leadership methodology plays a significant role in articulating sustainable improvements. In fact, it is professional associations and support networks with peers that enable educators to also become leaders in their schools researchers have contended (Carson et al., 2007). Beyond this, shared leadership efforts between district leaders, administration and teachers alike, have shown to have positive effects on student progress and achievement.

**Discussion**

Since 1964 and the passage of the Elementary Secondary Education Act (ESEA) several commissions funded by the federal government, under the direction of multiple presidents, have investigated ways to increase the proficiency of education systems and their students. The government adopted the tenets of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), in 2002. One requirement of NCLB mandated publicly reported summative testing to ensure accountability for teaching and learning. As legislated by NCLB, Ohio began sharing Local Report Card (LRC) (independent variable for the present study) ratings with all constituents.

Understanding the need to improve LRC ratings the State of Ohio brought together a team of stakeholders known as the Ohio Leadership Advisory Council (OLAC). Based on current research OLAC developed a strategic system’s framework titled: The Ohio Improvement Process (OIP) (dependent variable for this study). The OIP would facilitate academic and educational stakeholder involvement driven by school leaders and educational best practices. The Ohio Improvement Process would allow any district to begin a leadership-led systematic strategic planning process to increase the antecedents of success. It is the shared interest in improvement and the recognition that all stakeholders are valuable contributors to a school’s successes that indicates the efficacy of a “common approach and focus across all programs, departments, and offices within a district” (Lloyd et al., 2009, p. 1).
An assumption underlying all of Ohio’s work was to create a coherent and cohesive leadership development system to improve instructional practice and performance, regardless of role (Elmore, 2004). The focus of instructional leadership in exemplary programs would demonstrate a strong foundation not just built on theory and principles but built on how to steep leadership in experiences that would foster teaching and learning (Wallace Foundation, 2003). Leaders could take people to places they have never been before (Kouzes & Posner, 2007).

**Leadership Matters**

Research has found a statistically significant relationship between school district leadership and student achievement (Waters & Marzano, 2006). District leaders must adopt a proactive stance that ensures certain uniform behaviors occur in every school and in every classroom (Marzano & Waters, 2009). Elements of success must be pursued relentlessly and in concert, they are not a mystery any longer (Fullan, 2011). The willingness to articulate fundamental goals, the strategies for achieving those goals and the indicators that will be used to monitor progress towards the goals are vital to effective school leadership (DuFour & Marzano, 2011). Once known the foundation for replicating the antecedents of success may be documented and implemented year after year (Reeves, 2006). The fundamental purpose of effective school accountability systems is the improvement of teaching and learning (Reeves, 2009).

It will take a collaborative effort and widely dispersed leadership to meet the challenges confronting our schools, virtually everyone who has been elected to enter the field of education has the potential to lead (DuFour & Marzano, 2011). The collaborative strategic planning framework, the Ohio Improvement Process, developed by the Ohio Leadership
Advisory Council (OLAC), provides Ohio schools with the capability to demystify the antecedents of success and replicate best practices year after year. Implementation of the Ohio Improvement Process could offer even the highest performing districts a structured approach to begin to collaboratively explore effect data and link it with its cause(s) (Lloyd, McNulty & Telfer, 2009). The leaders in a school engaged in any continuous improvement process need to function as a facilitator of change and no longer as a director or the keeper of the keys (Colon, 1994). A common dialogue embracing a mutual vision of success realigns and redefines practices of greatest importance for increased and continued success (Waters & Marzano, 2006).

Achievement Matters

Raising achievement is important because it matters for individuals and society. For those with only a high school diploma, the standard of living in the United States is lower (Williams, 2007). People who achieve at a higher level will live longer, are healthier, and earn more money. People who earn more money pay more taxes, are less likely to depend upon Medicaid and welfare, and are less likely to be in prison. It has to be calculated that if the high school dropout would stay to graduate; the benefit to society would be $209,000 (Levin, Belfield, Muenning, & Rouse, 2007).

When understanding the impact and importance of achievement on the economy and the well-being of our country, it is paramount to raise student achievement for the greater good. To successfully raise student achievement, we must improve the quality of those who educate our students. Specifically we must work to improve educators we already have through relentlessly focusing on things that we can do to improve achievement (William, 2007). Leadership led strategic planning that contains collaborative goal setting, non-
negotiable goals for instruction, board alignment and support of academic goals, monitoring goals for achievement and instruction, and using resources to support achievement and instruction via leadership led strategic planning can be an end to the means to realized increased achievement (Waters & Marzano, 2006). When understanding the impact and importance of achievement on the economy and well-being of our country, it is paramount to raise student achievement.

**Research Question 1: Implementation of the OIP**

OIPIS survey items six, seven, and eight provided descriptive data for Research Question One: What is the degree of Ohio’s public school district’s implementation of the Ohio Improvement Process? Although 205 districts responded to the OIPIS, data from only those districts engaged in OIP participation could be analyzed for question one. This response rate equates to 25% of Ohio’s 613 districts that received LRC ratings last year.

Results highlighted the greatest number of the districts engaged in the OIP process have moved to Stages 3 (Implementing a Focused Plan) and 4 (Monitoring the Improvement Process). Over half of the districts have been engaged in the process since the 2008-2009 and 2009-2010 school years. This degree of involvement and commitment gives voice to the positive reflections of using the OIP framework that will be reported when discussing Research Question Four.

Respondents were asked to reflect on their overall commitment to the OIP and 17% shared they have stalled in their work moving through the OIP stages. Although participants reported they have stalled, their reflections of the use of OIP were high. The greatest number of districts that reported their work had stalled came from those districts that were currently in Stage 1 (Identifying Critical Needs). Although the OIPIS did not ask for further detail and
reflection to this point, the researcher and readers of this work may wonder why this is the case. One could surmise that leadership in these districts is not as directed as necessary, there may be time compression issues, the OIP is being used in conjunction with another framework, or there was a change in district leadership.

**Research Questions 2 and 3: Making Sense of Unexpected Results**

Research Questions Two and Three are very closely coupled. Analyzed with districts’ LRC ratings, Question 2 looked at a district’s level of commitment to the OIP to determine statistical significance while Question 3 looked at degree of OIP implementation. All respondents’ responses were used when analyzing data for Research Questions 2 and 3. This included the districts that have “Not Started” the OIP process.

*Research Question Two: Do Local Report Card ratings differ by level of commitment to the Ohio Improvement Process?* Research Question Two analyzed the commitment impact (OIPIS item 8) of OIP on LRC in two different ways. The first grouping looked at data of those districts that have “Not Started” the OIP process, those that are “Active” or “Stalled” within a Stage of the OIP, or those that have “Completed” the OIP. Analyzed results showed no statistical significance.

Although LRC (as a whole) is the most widely recognized “grade card” reporting measure in Ohio, LRC may not be sensitive enough to statistical analysis. LRC was a good choice to begin to build a foundation of research regarding OIP implementation; but in hindsight, a better approach may have been to use one of the statistical components of the LRC such as Value Added (VA) or Performance Index (PI) to make the analyzed comparisons. VA or PI could be reported by district leadership almost as easily as LRC and may have produced entirely different statistical outcomes. Outcomes that the researcher
perceived would be readily evident may come forward with the use of VA or PI. To use a more specific growth measure like these two would be an excellent study for follow-up research.

If the “Not Started” group of respondents is removed from the statistical analysis of Question 2 there is a trend that shows a slightly higher mean and mean rank for the groups that are further along in the OIP process. However, the differences in the means and mean ranks are not statistically significant, as they are slight. If the researcher were to do follow-up or future study, the “Not Started” group would be removed from this particular statistical analysis. The overall foundation of the research was to see how OIP impacted LRC not necessarily how those that have “Not Started” the process have impacted LRC ratings.

The second grouping of the same data again used results from the “Not Started” and the “Completed” groups but clustered the “Stalled” and “Active” responses regardless of what OIP Stage a district reported they currently resided. In this grouping of data, statistical significance was noted. However, the primary player in the significance was the “Not Started” group of respondents. Results showed the mean and mean rank of the “Not Started” group to be significantly higher than both the “Stalled” and “Completed” categories. It bears repeating that the study was looking at the impact of OIP on LRC and not of districts “Not Started” in the process. Having said this even if the “Not Started” group were removed in the current study, there is not statistical significance that shows a difference between the “Stalled”, “Active”, and “Completed” categories. Not unlike the grouping analyzing for the first part of Question 2, there was a trend in the results from Question 3 that showed the districts further along in the OIP process had higher LRC scores, albeit not statistically significant. Once again, the research would highlight that LRC used as a measure may not be
sensitive enough to show statistical significance as participants move through the OIP. To use the Value Added or Performance Index measure may have been more enlightening and make for interesting follow-up research.

In both groupings, the “Not Started” category noted the highest LRC scores. This may be due to the use of other strategic planning frameworks in districts where OIP is not used. Of the 45 (22%) “Not Started” districts, about half use some other form of strategic planning and the other half use no strategic planning at all.

*Research Question Three: Do Local Report Card ratings differ by the degree of implementation of the Ohio Improvement Process?* Although research Questions 2 and 3 are closely coupled, Research Question 2 referred to the *level of OIP commitment* (item 8) and Research Question 3 asked respondents in what *stage of OIP implementation* (item 6) they were involved.

Not unlike the results in Research Question 2, the mean and the mean rank of the “Not Started” group were descriptively the highest, highlighting that districts not involved in the OIP had higher LRC scores. When the “Not Started” group is removed, districts in Stage 4 of the OIP are noted to have slightly higher mean and mean ranks than the second highest group (those at Stage 3 of the OIP). Although not statistically significant, the latter difference shows that the trend is there for OIP to increase LRC. Future study should potentially use the Value Added or the Performance Index calculations in comparison for LRC to see if they are sensitive enough to producing statistical differences among OIP school districts participant’s LRC ratings.
Research Question 4: Valuing the Process

Research Question Four: To what degree do Ohio school district superintendents (or designees) value the Ohio Improvement Process? Demographic data collected show most respondents were district superintendents followed by respondents with job titles of assistant superintendent or director. Eighty-six percent of the respondents have been in their current leadership position for one or more years leaving the balance as newly assigned/hired. School districts generally do not see district-wide improvements in teaching and learning without substantial engagement of the central office and district leadership (Honig, Copland, Rainey, Lorton, & Newton, 2010).

Overall descriptive statistics generated from respondent opinion questions were very high. Respondents believe OIP has increased dialogue and communication in their districts, has increased the instructional leadership capabilities of their district’s central office and building administration, has helped their district introduce many new initiatives as presented to Ohio schools by the Ohio Department of Education, and 84% of respondents believe OIP has increased student progress and achievement. Via their responses district leaders reveal they are in agreement that a school leaders’ work is more meaningful, more exciting, and above all more central to the success of our educational systems (Fullan, 2011). Further the responses endorse the feelings of Waters and Marzano (2006) when they stated that research has found a statistically significant relationship between district leadership and student achievement. Overwhelmingly district leaders echo literature findings as to the importance of the positive implications of engaged district leadership.

The school district superintendent plays a significant role in articulating and reinforcing these goals so that sustainable improvement can be realized and replicated; such
goals are at the heart of OIP (Ohio Leadership Advisory Council non-negotiables, n.d.; Waters & Marzano, 2006). From the data collected one may assume reporting district leaders embrace the main tenet underlying work noted by the Ohio Leadership Advisory Council (2008) in writing the Ohio Improvement Process: Leadership in our schools and districts is extremely important in improving student achievement and effective school leaders are essential to implementing and sustaining meaningful school improvement efforts. Thus embracing (Deming (1986): Collaborative decision making is needed for a district engaged in continuous improvement.

Today, more than ever, when the stakes to improve student performance are high, it is imperative that educational leaders are equipped with the knowledge and skills they need to meet this challenge (OhioLeadership.org).

**Discussion of Other Findings**

Respondents to the OIPIS Questionnaire were asked to share the typology of their school district in item four. Being aware that districts of wealth may have purchased strategic planning frameworks and do not use the free OIP, which is available at no charge, the data from the urban/suburban districts with high median incomes and the urban/suburban districts with very high median incomes were given a second look regarding OIP participation. Of the 22 participating districts reporting high wealth, all but two use OIP as a stand-alone framework or in conjunction with another process. Of the eight very high income districts reporting, half use OIP, two use no plan, and two use another plan. These facts are of interest, as respondents in the high wealth typologies have Excellent or Excellent with Distinction LRC scores, except for one district, which is Effective. These statistics certainly highlight the perceived value of the OIP framework, either when implemented on its own or in conjunction
with another strategic planning initiative. Several of the more wealthy districts reported using district process in conjunction with OIP. In the very high income group, all LRC ratings were Excellent or Excellent with Distinction and six of the eight used a planning framework of some sort in including the four that use OIP. Although not statistically analyzed, it would seem that the wealthiest Ohio districts that participated in the present study have not implemented other strategic planning programs that are contributing to academic achievement. Their success may be coming from OIP as a stand-alone framework or when used in conjunction with another plan.

To note the typology of the districts involved in the OIPIS was important as previous research informs that the OIP was constructed for use by districts of all types across Ohio (Ohio Leadership.org). District cultures differ from one another, especially within a demographically heterogeneous State like Ohio, and for school reform efforts to succeed, it is necessary to understand and consider specific districts and how they sit within state initiative constructs (Ohio Improvement Process, 2010).

School district typologies as defined by the State of Ohio were reported in all categories except Island District and College Corner. The greatest number of responding districts fell under the typology of rural/small town, moderate to median income \((n = 70, 34\%)\) followed by rural, high poverty, low/median income at \((n = 42, 20\%)\). Across the state rural/small town districts number 81. Given these numbers, there was a high reporting response in this typology group in the present study. Rural high poverty districts across the state number 96; about half the districts in this typology responded to the OIPIS.

The district leaders of rural schools \((n = 140, 70\%)\), according to the Ohio Department of Education typologies of districts, answered the OIPIS Survey to a greater percentage (more
than double) than the urban/suburban district \((n = 62, 30\%)\). One might assume the smaller districts may have more direct involvement in OIP by the district superintendent or immediate designees than their urban/suburban counterparts due to the district size and scope of responsibilities. Thirty-four percent of responding schools have a moderate to median income and 34% have low to median income. Only 11% of school leaders with a high to median income answered the survey.

Looking specifically at the LRC rating reveals the following: The greatest number of districts answering the OIPIS had an Excellent rating of 37%. Although district by district ratings have not been published for school year 2011-2012 this closely parallels state reports from 2010-2011, when 215 (35.5%), districts earned an Excellent rating on their report card. The second greatest response came from school districts that are Effective (27%), which is 12 percentage points lower than the percentage of schools across the state that scored Effective \((n = 240, 39\%)\) on LRC in 2010-2011. Could the lower response rate be a sign that fewer districts in the Effective LRC rating category use OIP? Twenty-six percent of survey respondents answering the OIPIS were rated Excellent with Distinction. This was a high reporting percentage as only 14% of schools state-wide were rated Excellent with Distinction in school year 2010-2011. Of schools reporting they were Excellent with Distinction \((n = 6, 75\%)\) were engaged in strategic planning.

When “building” the research-based Ohio Improvement Process, the Ohio Leadership Advisory Council shared Essential Leadership Practices in six major areas of reform that were critical elements to the success of OIP. The essential practices included using a variety of tools, services, and products the Ohio Department of Education in partnership with districts would use to assist leadership teams in improving instructional practice and student
performance (Johnson, 2008). The reflections from school district leadership as reported on the OIPIS Questionnaire would validate the Essential Leadership Practices and the tools, services, and products that accompany those practices are working well in Ohio school districts that have deployed the OIP.

In summary, over the past five decades, history has noted and acknowledged a faltering educational system. These continued deficits in the educational system led to the eventual passage of No Child Left Behind just over eleven years ago. NCLB (2002) unlike its educational predecessors added documented benchmarks to ensure systematic education change. Of note, NCLB mandated the sharing of Local Report Cards (DV) publically each year. This mandate created a foundation for the State of Ohio to better understand leadership practices that could be shared with Ohio school districts to increase student progress and achievement. Thus the Ohio Improvement Process (IV) was written by the Ohio Leadership Advisory Council. The NCLB mandate and the perceived positive implications of the leadership led strategic planning via OIP directed four research questions for this study to determine the impact of OIP on LRC as related to data and previous research.

Without question the present study lends itself to building a foundation of knowledge for follow-up research. We are living a paradigm shift regarding the impact of school leadership on student progress and achievement. Although there may be not statistical significance when looking at a causal-comparative relationship between the Ohio Improvement Process and Local Report Card ratings, data shared by district leaders overwhelmingly highlights the benefits of using the Ohio Improvement Process, a strategic planning framework, in their respective school systems.
General Conclusions

While islands of excellence exist, individual school success may tell us something good about instructional practice and strategies for building student learning and achievement, district level success can be even more revelatory, highlighting leadership and reform approaches that may be replicated in other school systems across the country (MacBeath, 2008). While the success of an individual school often reflects a series of advantageous circumstance including a wealth of resources and committed and well-compensated staff, entire school districts are more often marked by a greater diversity and thus, improvement efforts that have impact across the system demonstrate a potential for broader application. OIP gives a school district the tools with which to understand the islands of excellence among us so we can generalize and use that knowledge base across our systems. Togneri and Anderson (2003) describe this view as moving away from “isolated islands of excellence” (individual, successful schools) to “systems of success” that serve to close the achievement gap (p. 1) (see also Barker, 2008; Jackson & Luneburg, 2010).

It is of note that data gathered for this study clearly shared that a system of planning that is district leadership led is of high importance in Ohio schools. Overwhelmingly district superintendents or their designees cite the positives of OIP strategic planning. Respondents resoundingly agree that the OIP process in their respective districts has increased communication amongst all stakeholders, has increased their view on the importance of instruction via setting a mission and vision, has helped their districts introduce a plethora of new initiatives introduced by the Ohio Department of Education, and above all OIP in their opinion has increased student progress and achievement. Most believe it is essential to have the district leadership participate in strategic planning. Redefining leadership as a set of
shared practices moves the conversation regarding school leadership from personal attributes or character traits of an individual to a conversation about adults at every level of the system/organization and what they can do together to continually improve instructional practice and hold each other accountable for improved student learning on a district-wide basis (OLAC Update, 2009). There is an urgent need for collective leadership and a statewide response for effectively addressing that need. Ohio’s leadership system must be anchored in teaching and learning, focused on building community and directed to ensuring the success of all children (Ohio Leadership Advisory council Agenda, n.d.). Ohio’s support system and strategy to guide this work in public school districts is the Ohio Improvement Process.

On the basis of inferential statistics reported in this study it is difficult to be certain the implementation of the Ohio Improvement Process framework is a foundation for increased LRC ratings. The LRC as the dependent variable may not be sensitive enough to measure the effectiveness of OIP. LRC has four components: 1) State Indicators, 2) Performance Index (PI), 3) Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), and 4) Value Added (VA) data. There is a real possibility that comparing OIP to a district’s VA or PI growth measures would illuminate a district’s effectiveness of OIP more clearly than the general comparison of LRC.

Most important to be noted: Shared instructional leadership (the foundation on which the Ohio Leadership Advisory Council wrote the OIP framework) embraces a team or group construct for arriving at district operating decisions. As previously expressed, there is evidence present from the OIPIS survey findings that district superintendents or designees fully embrace the importance of shared leadership and increased dialogue when addressing educational initiatives to increase progress and achievement for all via a strategic planning framework. The roles of all stakeholders in the school improvement effort are being
considered as well as the impact they may have on leadership reform efforts (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Togneri & Anderson, 2003). School leaders need to engage instructional staff in discussions on the value of instruction as well as how to plan and implement the instruction.

**Recommendations and Implications for Educators**

OIPIS survey respondents make a clear case for deploying a strategic planning framework in Ohio school districts and beyond. Respondents believe interaction via shared leadership when implementing a strategic planning process is valuable and delivers results when measuring student progress and achievement. Respondents also note the increased collaboration and communication that results from implementing a strategic planning framework such as the Ohio Improvement Process.

*Creating a World-Class Education System in Ohio* (2006) provided Ohio with three key factors and seven key implications to improve achievement. Of note was the need to empower school administrators to become instructional leaders. Descriptive statistics gathered for this study would validate a paradigm change is taking place with school district leadership in many Ohio schools. School leaders are managing their districts but also being instructional and involved as they work with their district leadership teams to dissect the work of their organization via the implementation of the Ohio Improvement Process. Further this notes that district leadership is embracing the use of shared leadership practices. Shared leadership is often seen within schools in which staff members share the responsibility for leading, based on their areas of expertise as well as their interest and commitment (Bligh, Pearce, & Kohles, 2006: Marks & Nance, 2007).
District leaders overwhelmingly agreed that the implementation of OIP strategic planning has increased dialogue with district stakeholders. The use of the OIP has helped district leaders introduce many new initiatives in their districts as the Ohio Department of Education has continued to revise, change, and introduce new standards for operation in the Local Educational Agencies (LEA) across Ohio. Eighty-four percent of OIPIS survey respondents felt the OIP has had a positive effect on student progress and achievement in their respective districts.

The use of the Ohio Improvement Process is free to Ohio school districts of all typologies regardless of superintendent tenure, average daily membership, or current Local Report Card ratings. The State of Ohio provides the training and the foundations of the program to any school district that wishes to implement the OIP. OIP underscores and highlights all aspects of a school district’s operation to develop a focused mission and vision via a shared leadership approach to increase student progress and achievement.

**Suggestions for Additional Research**

As school systems struggle to meet the legislative changes and demands, additional districts may turn to the OIP to further guide district leadership activities, promoting this unified mission and vision. To monitor the use of OIP in the future compared to the present would yield additional data regarding the implementation and successes of the Ohio Improvement Process on LRC or on district collaboration and instructional leadership.

Numerous changes highlight the landscape of education in Ohio. This is in part due to Ohio’s federally granted waiver which replaces portions No Child Left Behind. Moving forward with a clear mission and vision for school districts will be imperative.
Ohio’s LRC ratings will be reported in a different format beginning school year 2013-2014. The reporting framework will be more comprehensive. There will be value in understanding how OIP usage aligns with the new rating system as compared to the current rating system. Instead of using LRC as a whole, research could employ the use of growth measures VA and/or PI as the dependent variable to better understand the impact of OIP. Using a growth measure could make the statistics more sensitive and illuminate the impact and growth OIP produces. The Ohio Improvement Process creates a “living document”. Living documents should be reviewed, revisited, updated, and modified, over time as stakeholders change and as constituents move through the planning processes and stages of implementation.

Future research questions could also address the use of OIP within specific district typologies or school district size based on ADM. Typologies are tied to the size and the socio-economic level of districts across Ohio. Future study could help to understand if districts of wealth use OIP strategic planning or use other models that are associated with fee structures.

A qualitative study from the inception and deployment of the OIP in a school district would be an informative research undertaking. A qualitative study could closely follow a district’s OIP implementation process and document changes witnessed in a district’s leadership approach which would impact progress and achievement. This work could look very different based on the school district’s typology, ADM, and the leadership style of the central office. A district could begin, define, and record antecedents of success for replication in their own districts as well as similar districts.
Conclusion

The goal of this study was to examine the strength of the relationship of the OIP to LRC ratings as it pertains to student progress and achievement. In hindsight is bears repeating that to use LRC as a whole may not have been as sensitive as necessary to statistical calculations. To have use Value Added or Performance Index data may have provided the sensitivity needed to show statistical growth in the school deploying OIP.

Respondents to the OIPIS Questionnaire that are presently using OIP as a standalone planning framework find the Ohio Improvement Process worthy and valuable. OIP is noted to be achieving what it was developed to do and that is increase progress and achievement via leadership led planning when all aspects of a public school districts are dissected with fidelity.

Although the statistical analysis of data provided by 205 district leaders in Ohio via the OIPIS Questionnaire did not statistically show a causal relationship between the use of OIP on LRC the foundation for follow-up study has been laid. Had data from those districts not engaged in OIP been removed the trends would show that the implementation of OIP is working. The districts that were currently active in OIP and had “Not Stalled” in their work reported higher LRC ratings.

The researcher anticipates the work and the findings within will be a catalyst for new ways of understanding and learning in districts with no leadership-led planning process and further increase the ways of knowing in districts currently embracing the Ohio Improvement Process as a planning framework. Drs. Marzano and Waters and many others have statistically documented that positive leadership practices increase student progress and achievement. In an era of educational accountability: Leadership matters.
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APPENDIX A. BOWLING GREEN STATE UNIVERSITY – HSRB

DATE: February 14, 2013

TO: Sandra Sue Goodsite
FROM: Bowling Green State University Human Subjects Review Board

PROJECT TITLE: [362377-3] The Ohio Improvement Process and Strategic Planning: The Impact on Local Report Card Ratings

SUBMISSION TYPE: Amendment/Modification

ACTION: APPROVED APPROVAL DATE: February 12, 2013
EXPIRATION DATE: January 31, 2014
REVIEW TYPE: Expedited Review

REVIEW CATEGORY: Expedited review category # [enter category, or delete line]

Thank you for your submission of Amendment/Modification materials for this project. The Bowling Green State University Human Subjects Review Board has APPROVED your submission. This approval is based on an appropriate risk/benefit ratio and a project design wherein the risks have been minimized. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

The final approved version of the consent document(s) is available as a published Board Document in the Review Details page. You must use the approved version of the consent document when obtaining consent from participants. Informed consent must continue throughout the project via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require that each participant receives a copy of the consent document.

Please add the text equivalent of the HSRB IRBNet approval/expiration date stamp to the “footer” area of the electronic consent document.

Please note that you are responsible to conduct the study as approved by the HSRB. If you seek to make any changes in your project activities or procedures, those modifications must be approved by this committee prior to initiation. Please use the modification request form for this procedure.

You have been approved to enroll 614 participants. If you wish to enroll additional participants you must seek approval from the HSRB.

All UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS involving risks to subjects or others and SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported promptly to this office. All NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this project must also be reported promptly to this office.

This approval expires on January 31, 2014. You will receive a continuing review notice before your project expires. If you wish to continue your work after the expiration date, your documentation for continuing review must be received with sufficient time for review and continued approval before the expiration date.
Good luck with your work. If you have any questions, please contact the Office of Research Compliance at 419-372-7716 or hsrb@bgsu.edu. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence regarding this project.

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within Bowling Green State University Human Subjects Review Board's records.
Ohio Public School Districts’ Implementation of the Ohio Improvement Process (OIP) in Relationship to Local Report Card (LRC) Ratings

My name is Sandra “Sue” Goodsite. I am a doctoral candidate in the Education Leadership program at Bowling Green State University in the College of Education and Administration. I am conducting a research study that will examine the degree of implementation of the Ohio Improvement Process in public school districts across Ohio in comparison to Local Report Card ratings.

Positive school leadership is essential for student success. The Ohio Improvement Process (OIP) highlights and systematically guides stakeholders to employ best educational and leadership practices to increase student progress and achievement. The impact of the OIP has not yet been compared to legislated annually published district report card ratings to determine the effect of this leadership-led strategic planning process. Your participation in this study will help to inform school leaders and state policy makers about the degree of implementation of this important initiative.

I am requesting participation of all public school superintendents (or their designees) with tenure of one year or longer in their current district. Your consent to participate will be verified when you complete and return the Ohio Improvement Process Involvement Survey (OIPIS).

Understanding time compression issues of school personnel, the survey has been kept short and to the point. You are being asked to participate in this seven to ten minute 15 item survey to create a foundation of knowledge for those involved in the work of the Ohio Leadership Advisory Council, for the Ohio Department of Education, and educational leaders across the State of Ohio.

Your participation in this study is voluntary and you may withdraw at any time. Your decision to participate (or not) will have no impact on any relationship you may have with Bowling Green State University. The risks associated with this study are no greater than those experienced in daily life. Responses to this electronic survey are anonymous. I have included two optional items at the end of the survey asking for your school district’s name and an email address. Both pieces of information will be used to notify participants of survey results if they so desire to share a district name and electronic address. I will maintain confidentiality of the results and will report all data in aggregate form only. No single school district or administrator will be identifiable in the study. I will store the data in a locked file cabinet and I will be the only person who has access to it. All data will be destroyed upon completion of the study.

All survey responses will be collectively reported and are held as confidential.

As this survey is online, I encourage you to clear your Internet browser and page history once you have completed the survey.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this survey please contact me at 419-660-1813 or goodsites@norwalk-city.k12.oh.us. You may also contact my advisor, Dr. Patrick Pauken, at 419-372-9234 or paukenp@bgsu.edu. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant, please contact the Human Subjects Review Board at Bowling Green State University, 419-372-7716 or hsrb@bgsu.edu.

Your time and answers to this survey would be greatly appreciated by a fellow educator/researcher.

Sincerely,
Sandra Sue Goodsite
Assistant Superintendent
Norwalk City Schools

If you are willing to participate in the study, please click the following link to access the survey: [INSERT LINK HERE]. Please complete this survey by December 12, 2013. Clicking the link signifies consent.
APPENDIX C. OIPIS SURVEY

OHIO IMPROVEMENT PROCESS INVOLVEMENT SURVEY (OIPIS)

1. As the district liaison/inside facilitator for the Ohio Improvement Process, please share your formal designated job title in the district?

   1. Superintendent
   2. Assistant Superintendent
   3. Director
   4. Building Administrator
   5. Teacher Leader

2. How long have you held your current position as a school district superintendent, assistant superintendent, director, building level administrator, or teacher leader?

   1. Less than 1 year
   2. 1 or 2 years
   3. 3 or 4 years
   4. More than four years

3. How long have you served as your district’s point of contact/facilitator for the OIP strategic planning process?

   1. Less than 1 year
   2. 1 or 2 years
   3. 3 or 4 years

4. What is the typology of your district as defined by the Ohio Department of Education?

   1. Island District or College Corner
   2. Rural, high poverty, low median income
   3. Rural, small student population, low poverty, low to median income
   4. Rural/small town, moderate to median income
   5. Major urban, very high poverty
   6. Urban, low median income, high poverty
   7. Urban/suburban, high median income
   8. Urban, suburban, very high median income, very low poverty
5. What was your district’s Local Report Card (LRC) rating for school year 2011-2012?

1. Excellent with Distinction
2. Excellent
3. Effective
4. Continuous Improvement
5. Academic Watch
6. Academic Emergency

(Item 5 was recoded as noted below for purposes of running statistical analysis.)

1. Academic Emergency
2. Academic Watch
3. Continuous Improvement
4. Effective
5. Excellent
6. Excellent with Distinction

6. In what stage of the Ohio Improvement Process framework is your district currently involved? (Taken from the OIP Facilitator Activities by Stage document.)

1. We have not started the OIP process

2. Stage 1 – Identifying Critical Needs – working with leadership teams to complete a comprehensive needs assessment that identifies the critical needs and probable cause based on data by the DLT to: Effectively summarize and analyze data sets, understand and apply the decision framework, interpret key findings from the needs assessment and prioritize critical problems.

3. Stage 2: Developing a Focused Plan - Working with leadership teams to develop limited number of focused district goals, strategies, and action steps based on data and a limited number of building actions aligned to district goals using SMART goals, prioritized cause and effect relationships, strategies for meeting goals, and actions that will increase student performance and achievement.

4. Stage 3: Implementing the Focused Plan - Working with leadership teams to implement, and monitor the degree of implementation, of the focused plan by supporting team members to establish collaborative structures, processes and practices, implement a systematic plan, and monitor and analyze change in student performance and adult implementations.

5. Stage 4: Monitoring the Improvement Process - Work with leadership teams to evaluate the improvement process and make necessary changes to continually improve instructional practice and student performance by supporting team members to evaluate plans, summarize plan progress, and modify instructional practices.
7. In what school year did your district begin the Ohio Improvement Process?

1. School year: 2011 - 2012
2. School year: 2010 - 2011
3. School year: 2009 - 2010

8. If your district has begun the Ohio Improvement Process, what best describes your district’s level of commitment during school year 2011-2012?

1. We began our work in stage 1 and remained there for the year.
2. We began our work in stage 1 and moved to stage 2.
3. We began our work in stage 1 and moved to stage 2 and 3.
4. We began our work in stage 1 and moved to stage 2, 3, and 4.
5. We began our work in stage 2 and remained there for the year.
6. We began our work in stage 2 and moved to stage 3.
7. We began our work in stage 2 and moved to stage 3 and 4.
8. We began our work in stage 3 and remained there for the year.
9. We began our work in stage 3 and moved to stage 4.
10. We began our work in stage 4 and remained there for the year.
11. We have moved through the OIP stages and are revisiting our goals/mission/vision.

(Item 8 recoded using two different approaches to analyze Research Question 2.)

Recoding Method “1”

1. Not Started
2. Items 1, 2, 3, and 4 added together
3. Items 5, 6, and 7 added together
4. Items 8 and 9 added together
5. Item 10
6. Item 11

Recoding Method “2”

1. Not Started
2. Stalled = adding items 1, 5, 8, and 10
3. Currently Active = adding items 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, and 9
4. Completed = item 11
Please answer questions 9, 10, 11, and 12 using Likert Scale ratings of Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree.

9. In your opinion, has the implementation of the Ohio Improvement Process, increased district dialogue between administration, teaching staff, and other district stakeholders serving on the District Level Team (DLT)?

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Disagree
4. Strongly disagree

10. Instructional leadership is defined as: Encouraging educational achievements by making instruction a top priority for the school district and bringing that vision/mission to realization (Leadership for Student Success). In your opinion, has the Ohio Improvement Process increased instructional leadership of central office and building level administration in your district?

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Disagree
4. Strongly disagree

11. Has the use of District Level Teams (created via the Ohio Improvement Process) helped district leadership introduce current ODE educational initiatives such as: Data Dissection, the Model Curriculum, Standard’s Revisions, Common Core State Standards, Formative Assessments, The Third Grade Guarantee, Student Learning Objectives, new evaluation processes, and the Next Generation Assessments in your district?

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Disagree
4. Strongly disagree

12. Has/will the implementation of the Ohio Improvement Process increased progress and achievement of students in your district?

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Disagree
4. Strongly disagree
13. Is district level leadership participation essential for the implementation of a strategic planning framework to increase progress and achievement of students?
   1. Yes
   2. No

14. Is your district currently using a strategic planning framework other than the Ohio Improvement Process?
   1. We do not use a strategic planning framework in our district.
   2. We use only the Ohio Improvement Process strategic planning framework in our district.
   3. We use the OIP framework in conjunction with another strategic planning framework.
   4. We do not use the OIP but use another strategic planning program.

15. Optional: Please share your school district’s name.

Optional: Please share your email address. All survey responses will be collectively reported and held as confidential.

Your time and attention to answering the OIPIS survey is appreciated. Thank you very much!
APPENDIX D. OIP DIAGRAM

Ohio Improvement Process

STAGE 1
Identify Critical Needs of Districts and Schools

STAGE 2
Develop a Focused Plan

STAGE 3
Implement and Monitor the Focused Plan

STAGE 4
Evaluate the Improvement Process

Detailed instructions for each stage and involved teams are shown in the diagram. The diagram outlines the roles of various leadership teams and how they contribute to the identification and monitoring of critical needs in districts and schools.

Updated: November 2020
GUIDE TO
UNDERSTANDING OHIO’S ACCOUNTABILITY
SYSTEM
2010-2011

Guide Overview

This guide is designed to assist in explaining Ohio’s accountability system. Major components of Ohio’s accountability system include:

1. The use of multiple measures to evaluate the performance of schools and districts. Ratings are computed based on State Indicators, Performance Index, Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) and Value-Added data. These four components measure the achievement and progress of students within a school building or school district.

2. Designations (Excellent with Distinction, Excellent, Effective, Continuous Improvement, Academic Watch and Academic Emergency) for traditional and community schools.

3. Recognition and consequences for schools that do or do not show improvement.

4. Accountability for various groups of students, including:
   - Economically disadvantaged students;
   - Students from major racial and ethnic groups;
   - Students with disabilities; and
   - Students with limited English proficiency.
Ohio’s Accountability System

The State and Local Report Cards for the 2010-2011 school year show the performance of districts and schools using four separate measures. The combination of the four measures described below is the basis for assigning state designations to each district, school building and community school. The six designations are Excellent with Distinction, Excellent, Effective, Continuous Improvement, Academic Watch and Academic Emergency.

State Indicators

Districts and schools earn credit for performance indicators by, meeting or exceeding the goal of 75 percent proficient or above on:

- 3rd-grade achievement tests: reading, mathematics
- 4th-grade achievement tests: reading, mathematics
- 5th-grade achievement tests: reading, mathematics, science
- 6th-grade achievement tests: reading, mathematics
- 7th-grade achievement tests: reading, mathematics
- 8th-grade achievement tests: reading, mathematics, science
- Ohio Graduation Test – 10th-grade: reading, mathematics, writing, science, social studies

Meeting or exceeding the goal of 85 percent proficient or above on:

- Ohio Graduation Test – Cumulative 11th grade: reading, mathematics, writing, science, social studies

Meeting or exceeding the 90 percent state requirement in:
Graduation Rate

Meeting or exceeding the 93 percent state requirement in:

Attendance Rate

Districts and schools that meet higher percentages of indicators could receive higher designations. Districts are evaluated based on all 26 indicators. School buildings and community schools, however, may be evaluated on fewer indicators depending on the grade levels offered in the building or community school.

Performance Index

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

All tests have five performance levels – advanced, accelerated, proficient, basic and limited. The percentage of students scoring at each performance level is calculated and then multiplied by the point value assigned to that performance level.

The percentage of students performing at the advanced level is multiplied by 1.2 points. The percent at the accelerated level is multiplied by 1.1 points. The percent at the proficient level is multiplied by 1.0 point. The percent at the basic level is multiplied by 0.6 points. The percent at the limited level is multiplied by 0.3 points. Untested students are included in the calculation and are assigned a value of 0 points.
Value Added

The Value-Added measure recognizes that districts and schools may be making significant improvement in the academic performance of their students even though they may have not met the standard for student achievement. While achievement scores demonstrate a student’s level of proficiency at one point in time, the Valued-Added measure reflects how much progress was made since the prior year.

Value-added results are calculated for districts and schools with grades 4-8 in reading and mathematics. Additionally, a composite result will be displayed on the front of the report card. The composite impacts the district or school’s rating. Results will be displayed using the following symbols:

+ A plus symbol indicates that a district or school has achieved more than one year of expected growth for their students over the past year.

√ A check symbol indicates that a district or school has achieved one year of expected growth for their students over the past year.

— A minus symbol indicates that a district or school has achieved less than one year of expected growth for their students over the past year.

A district or school that achieves, on the composite result, an Above Expected Growth may experience an increase in its rating by one designation (prior to this year, schools and districts were required to have two years of Above Expected Growth to move up a designation). For instance, a school otherwise rated as Effective may be raised to Excellent if it achieves more than one year of expected growth (a + designation). Districts and schools that show Below Expected Growth for three consecutive years will have their designation reduced. (See Page 9 for additional changes to the Value-Added calculation.)
Previously, it took two years of Above Expected Growth to receive a boost in the report card designation. Beginning with the 2011-2012 report cards, districts and schools that show Below Expected Growth for two consecutive years (rather than the current three years) will have their designation reduced.

**High School Buildings and Value-Added Results**

Since traditional high school buildings do not have Value-Added results, high schools that are classified as Academic Watch or Academic Emergency have the ability to improve their designation by significantly improving their Performance Index. If these buildings improve their Performance Index by at least 10 points over two years, with at least a three-point increase in the current year, they can move up one designation.

**Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)**

AYP is a federally required measure that is included in Ohio’s accountability system. Every school and district must meet AYP goals that are established for reading and mathematics proficiency and test participation, attendance rate and graduation rate.

AYP determinations for districts and schools are based on test participation and proficiency rate goals. These goals are evaluated for the student groups (listed on page 5) when the minimum subgroup size has been met. AYP graduation and attendance goals are evaluated for the All Students group only. Failure to meet any of the proficiency or participation goals, attendance levels or graduation targets results in the district or school not meeting AYP. Ohio law states that a district or school that meets AYP can be designated no lower than Continuous Improvement. Additionally, the law states that a district or school that does not meet AYP goals for three consecutive years, and does not meet it for more than one student group in the most recent year, can be rated no higher than Continuous Improvement.
How to Meet AYP

Districts and schools can meet AYP in one of four ways:

1. Current-year results: The proficiency level, weighted across all tested grades, is at or above the AYP goal.

2. Two-year combined results: The proficiency level weighted across all tested grades is at or above the current year AYP goal when results from the current year are combined with the results from the prior school year.

3. Safe Harbor: A student group must make a 10 percent or greater reduction in its percentage of non-proficient students from the previous year, and they must meet the AYP goal in the secondary indicator (graduation rate and/or attendance rate).

4. Growth Model: Through the growth model, a non-proficient student projected to be on a path to proficiency within two years will be treated as proficient in the current year. The growth model uses data from the Ohio Achievement tests in grades 3-8, so traditional high school buildings (those with grades 9-12) cannot use the growth model to meet AYP.

Meeting AYP for two consecutive years may move a district out of District Improvement Status. The Ohio Model of Differentiated Accountability helps to build capacity for school reform and take the most significant actions for the lowest-performing schools, including addressing the issue of teacher effectiveness and use of data to determine the method of differentiation and categories of intervention. Resources and interventions will be targeted to those schools most in need of intensive intervention and significant intervention. This model continues to require schools and districts to meet NCLB Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) goals for all groups of students, including economically
disadvantaged, minority, limited English proficient and students with disabilities, but it allows Ohio to vary the intensity and type of interventions to match the academic reasons that lead to the district/schools’ identification.

**Value-Added Calculation**

In addition to the change in the effect of the Value-Added calculation (see Page X), the process has changed to establish a more rigorous statistical process for calculating the growth standard. Technically speaking, it changes the criteria for meeting the growth standard from one to two standard errors of measurement. The visible effect is that the new calculation requires greater statistical evidence that a school or district is below or above expected growth. The result is that there will be fewer schools in the “below” and “above” categories.

**For More Information**

ODE Office of Public Affairs

Phone: (614) 995-3867

Fax: (614) 728-5453

Districts and Schools – If you have questions about Ohio’s accountability system, please contact ODE’s Office of Policy and Accountability at (614)728-4510.

Website Links

The Ohio Department of Education - http://education.ohio.gov and http://ilrc.ode.state.oh.us

Ohio Report Cards - http://reportcard.ohio.gov