PRINCIPALS’ ROLE PERCEPTION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF EDUCATIONAL REFORM

Jesse A. Hotmire

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Committee:

Patrick Pauken, Advisor

Stephen Demuth
Graduate Faculty Representative

Jamison Grime

Tracy Huziak-Clark

Paul Johnson
ABSTRACT

Patrick Pauken, Advisor

A theme in education stems from comparing international students’ scores on standardized tests with sub-par American students’ scores. The gap between the scores of international students and American students has prompted educational reforms to be passed by state and federal legislatures in the United States. This study begins with an investigation in the *A Nation at Risk* report and includes No Child Left Behind, Race to the Top, Common Core, and the Every Student Succeeds Act. States and school districts across the United States have struggled with adapting these educational reforms over the last few decades. Therefore, research on educational leadership over the decades has provided insight into strategies educational leaders can utilize to successfully implement educational reform. Additionally, the National Policy Board for Educational Administration (NPBEA) established the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (2015) to provide a set of updated standards for educational leaders.

Often tasked with implementing educational reform, principals routinely bear the brunt of guiding the people in their buildings through the maze of changes.

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to discover how six principals see their role and what those six principals do to implement educational reforms. The intended method of coding and data analysis is an existing method by Moustakas (1994). The research questions guiding the study are (1) What do principals from secondary schools in Northwest Ohio perceive to be their role as instructional leaders concerning the implementation of Ohio’s Learning Standards and assessments? and (2) What leadership strategies do principals utilize to carry out implementation of Ohio’s Learning Standards and assessments in their school environment?
Themes from this study that revealed principals’ role perspective included their desire to practice distributed leadership and build relationships to foster a culture of collaboration. The emergent themes regarding leadership strategies included principals’ facilitation of teacher preparation and instruction to implement Ohio’s Learning Standards and assessments. Another major theme was challenges of rural high school principals. The implications for principals include to: maintain a positive attitude, search for solutions to challenges that predictably arise during times of change, utilize proven instructional leadership practices, and leverage their rural community characteristics to care for people. These qualities will help principals effectively lead their buildings through educational reforms.
This dissertation is dedicated to:

First and foremost to Jesus Christ, my Lord and Savior. Psalm 25:4-5

My parents, for their ever-present love, support, and encouragement. Your intentional teaching of work ethic, dedication, and respect have shaped my life and helped me on this journey. You said I should do this years before I did - I just had to get the coaching bug out of my system first.

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Soli Deo Gloria – To God alone be the Glory
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Background of the Problem</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose of the Study</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theoretical Framework</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance of the Study</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working Definitions</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delimitations</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization of the Remaining Chapters</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER II. LITERATURE REVIEW</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Expectations of Principals Today</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modern Education Reform in the United States</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Nation at Risk, 1983</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>America 2000</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goals 2000: Educate America</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Child Left Behind Act, 2001</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, 2009</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common Core State Standards Initiative</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I

V. PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

Findings

Research Question #1

Distributed Leadership

Build Relationships

Research Question #2

Facilitating Teacher Preparation

Facilitating Teacher Instruction

Challenges for Rural Schools’ Principals
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER V. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overview of the Study</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion of Findings</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role Perception</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practice Distributed Leadership</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Build Relationships</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendations for Leadership</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership Strategies</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitate Teacher Preparation</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitate Teacher Instruction</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendations for Leadership</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenges for Rural High School Principals</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendations for Leadership</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership for Learning in Rural Schools</td>
<td>151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendations for Further Research</td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REFERENCES</td>
<td>157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX A. INFORMED CONSENT LETTER</td>
<td>179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX B. FIRST INTERVIEW SCRIPT AND QUESTIONS</td>
<td>180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX C. SECOND INTERVIEW SCRIPT AND QUESTIONS</td>
<td>183</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Adapted from a Synthesized Model of Leadership for Learning</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Adapted from Instructional Management Role of the Principal</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Adapted from the PIMRS Instructional Leadership Model Conceptual Framework</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Overview of Principals’ Situation</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Findings from Data Analysis</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

Background of the Problem

A common theme regarding educational policy issues in America revealed in education research reports and media headlines is exemplified by the following headline in the New York Times, “The United States, Falling Behind” (Editorial Board New York Times, 2013). The New York Times Editorial Board reported on a comparison study of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). Their report stated that America was behind most European nations in numeracy, literacy, and problem solving. The editorial board concluded, “The United States has yet to take on a sense of urgency about this issue. If that does not happen soon the country will pay a long-term price” (Editorial Board New York Times, 2013, p. A28).

The OECD statistical reports and recommendations highlighted by the media have caused government leaders, education policy wonks, and other education stakeholders to produce twenty-first century standards-based educational reforms such as No Child Left Behind (NCLB), the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), and Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) (Toscano, 2013; U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Twenty-first century education reforms directly trace their content to the 1983 National Commission on Excellence in Education’s (NCEE) report (Kenna & Russell, 2014). Commonly titled A Nation at Risk, the NCEE report noted that the nation’s ills were a result of failing schools and recommended that schools implement improved standards (Kenna & Russell, 2014). In 1989, President George H.W. Bush called for an educational conference, chaired by then Governor of Arkansas Bill Clinton, to brainstorm ideas regarding national education performance goals, resulting in America 2000 (Wallender, 2014). The A Nation at Risk report, OECD recommendations, and subsequent educational
conferences also led to the first federally promoted national standards reform initiated by President Bill Clinton, called Goals 2000 (Wallender, 2014).

Administrators across the nation responded to the *A Nation at Risk* report with a leadership shift from primarily being managers to adding the responsibility of improving teaching and learning (Hunt, 2008). The increased focus on graduation requirements, standards, longer school hours, enhanced teacher certification, and assessments required principals to seek to develop leadership skills (Hunt, 2008). Bossert (1982) of the Far West Lab, Leithwood (1983), and Hallinger and Murphy (1985) were conducting research in the 1980s specific to instructional leadership and school principals (Hallinger & Wang, 2015, Neumerski, 2010). The research conclusions provided insight and training in the educational leadership skills principals needed to usher schools into the age of twenty-first century educational reforms (Hallinger & Wang, 2015). The professional development principals attended was based on the instructional leadership research outcomes and focused on helping teachers improve their instruction with new ideas and distributing leadership responsibilities (Hunt, 2008).

An additional federal educational reform proposed by President George W. Bush, called the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, continued to impact principals’ leadership. No Child Left Behind (NCLB) was passed by Congress in 2001 and provided for a stronger emphasis on reading, increased accountability for schools and states through state standards and assessments, greater school choice for parents, and more flexibility for states and school districts and their use of federal money (U.S. Department of Education, 2002). States proceeded to enact the educational reforms, but issues arose in lack of funding and achievement gap problems for students moving from one state to another (Wallender, 2014). Achievement gap problems also continue to exist for minority students and students from the lower SES (Haretos, 2003).
Further, students living in rural areas, regardless of race, experience an achievement gap (Bailey, 2014). In an effort to address the apparent funding and achievement gap problems in NCLB, President Barack Obama initiated a federal program in 2009 called Race to the Top (RttT) to provide federal grants to schools wishing to implement the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) (U.S. Department of Education, 2015).

On July 14, 2009, Education Secretary Arne Duncan encouraged the States to accept the opportunity to receive a share of approximately $5 billion dollars to improve schools and student achievement (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). The opportunity for obtaining a portion of the Race to the Top funds included implementing the following measures: adopt standards and assessments to prepare students for college and careers to complete in the global economy; build data systems that measure student growth; determine teacher and principal effectiveness; recruit, reward and retain effective teachers and principals; and turn around the lowest achieving schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). The implementation of policies for accountability included tying teacher and principal evaluations to student performance on high stakes tests and rigorous evaluations directly impacting job retention and tenure (Murphy & Torff, 2014).

Additionally, Secretary Duncan made it clear that in order to be accepted, a State had to accept internationally benchmarked standards and assessments developed by Achieve, Inc., the National Governors Association, and the Council of Chief State School Officers (Toscano, 2013). The only standards that fit the Department of Education stipulations were the Common Core State Standards (Toscano, 2013).

The CCSS were divided into two broad categories: college and career readiness and K-12 standards in English and Mathematics. The college and career readiness standards were developed by a committee of stakeholders including scholars, teachers, school leaders,
professional organizations, and parents. The standards were then integrated into the K-12 standards. The resulting CCSS are empirically based, clear and understandable, consistent, measureable, provide college and career readiness, provide rigor in knowledge and critical thinking skills, and informed by curriculum from high performing countries (CCSSI, 2015; National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, 2011; Eilers & D’Amico, 2012).

Although the adoption of Common Core has been widespread, controversy has arisen. Challenging the constitutionality of Common Core, some have called President Obama’s urging for the States to accept the criteria and adopt the Common Core an exceptional federal overreach into education (Burke, Marshall, Sheffield, Corona, & Stotsky, 2013). Can the federal government mandate educational measures to the States? Wallender (2015), a proponent of Common Core, stated that a federal government mandate of Common Core adoption is unconstitutional because a federal mandate violates the federalism principle that States are in charge of education in their respective State. Toscano (2013) argued that the Common Core State Standards initiative is top-down from the federal government. He stated that the standards were not created by the States as the Common Core State Standards website claims. Instead, the standards were crafted and sponsored by entrepreneurs, especially the Gates Foundation, and private Washington-based organizations which created a unique mesh of private and federal entities (Rycik, 2014; Toscano, 2013; Wexler, 2014). Further, Toscano (2013) stated that the rush for States to adopt Common Core points to a top-down initiative. State applications were due June 1, 2010, and the final draft of the standards was published June 2, 2010, forcing States to accept standards not wholly completed (Layton, 2014; McGroarty & Robbins, 2012). The Gates Foundation has given billions of dollars to states such as Kentucky and organizations such as the American Federation of Teachers, the National Education Association, and the Foundation
for Excellence in Education to promote and pass the CCSS (Layton, 2014, Strauss, 2016). For example, $5 million was given to the University of North Carolina-affiliated Hunt Institute to advocate for the Common Core in statehouses around the country (Layton, 2014). Jay P. Greene, head of the Department of Education Reform at the University of Arkansas, stated that the Gates Foundation’s influence on CCSS has subtly muffled dissent (Layton, 2014). Additionally, the fact that the federal government offered billions of dollars to States in exchange for adoption of Common Core and waivers from No Child Left Behind indicates the top-down nature of Common Core (Layton, 2014; Burke, et al., 2013).

Another related criticism of CCSS points to the issue of liberty and freedom of school districts and parents. The issue is that parents, teachers, and local districts have been displaced in their role as decision makers regarding the education of children and replaced by think tanks created by corporate privatization and Washington bureaucrats (Burke, et al., 2013; Wexler, 2014). No recourse is possible for those local education entities when they do have concerns because the rights of the Common Core are solely owned by National Governor’s Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers (Toscano, 2013). The lack of freedom for local entities to determine the education standards led to waning public support for Common Core in recent months. Several states such as Oklahoma, South Carolina, and Indiana had voted to adopt Common Core; however, these states have decided to pause their adoption and implementation of Common Core based on a grass roots movement to stop the Common Core in the state (Burke, et al., 2013; Cohn, 2014; Layton, 2014).

Common Core does not only have detractors. Proponents of the CCSS commonly point to the need to align all states with identical standards in this age of mobility (Kenna & Russell, 2014). Calls for educational reform over the years to improve student achievement are leading to
advocacy for common standards, preparing students for college, stressing quality education for all students, and increasing rigor (Wallender, 2014). These four implications to improve student achievement are all found in the CCSS. Bailey (2013) stated that CCSS might be suitable to address learning deficiencies especially for underrepresented learners.

According to the Common Core website, Ohio is one of 42 states to have accepted RttT money and adopted the CCSS (CCSSI, 2015). Therefore, Ohio’s educational leaders are faced with the task of implementing standardized curriculum and assessment reforms in schools. Mel Riddle, director of high school services for the National Association of Secondary Schools Principals (NASSP), stated that principals must understand the many moving parts of schools to lead staff toward successful implementation of the CCSS (Gewertz, 2012). Moving parts in schools include a cohesive mission and school culture, collaboration, staff preparation, and understanding the context of educational reform (Fullan, 2009, p. 42). The 21st century reforms of standardized curriculum and assessments, specifically CCSS, place the burden of implementation especially on building principals (Eilers & D’Amico, 2012). Eilers and D’Amico (2012) further stated that school leaders have the responsibility to lead building staffs through the maze of change to implement the CCSS and reduce frustration and failure. The importance of principals guiding teachers through the maze of moving parts is especially important due to the results from a recent national survey of United States teachers that revealed teachers felt unprepared to teach the new standards (Gewertz, 2013; Murphy & Torff, 2014). Eilers and D’Amico (2012) identified specific roles principals need to fulfill for their schools to meet standards and assessment requirements, including establishing a vision to promote school values and culture, encouraging collaboration among the staff, determining priorities, facilitating professional development, encouraging risk taking, and providing specific feedback to faculty.
The important roles principals play in implementing educational reform and the controversy surrounding Race to the Top and the CCSS resulted in the U.S. Department of Education producing *A Blueprint for Reform* (2010). This document led to the passage of the Every Student Succeeds Act, a reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), in 2015. The law provided states greater flexibility in many areas of educational reform. Forty-two states including Ohio have been approved by the federal government for ESEA flexibility (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). The law specifically states that the federal government cannot require a specific set of curriculum standards. However, states still had to keep rigorous national standards and keep national standardized assessments. The law eliminated the federal requirement of the Highly Qualified Teacher status and educator evaluations. However, states must provide a system that measures equitable access for economically disadvantaged and minority students. Ohio currently is developing a plan to address necessary changes to curriculum, assessments, graduation rates, chronic absenteeism and English language proficiency. A more thorough examination of Ohio’s ESSA plan will occur in Chapter Two (Ohio Department of Education, 2016; U.S. Department of Education, 2015).

Another focus of ESSA further impacting principals is the accountability for student achievement via building report cards issued by the state, possible termination of contract, or reassignment in the district (Murphy & Torff, 2014). Essentially, these elements cause internal pressure from the local superintendent and school board as well as external pressure from the public to see positive student achievement results. Further, Robinson and Timperley (2007) argued that principals are solely managers in the culture of compliance embodied in the education world rather than instructional leaders in a culture to promote learning. The dimensions of instructional leadership and in particular leadership for learning provide a lens to
view the impact educational leaders make on school enhancement and student learning (Hallinger, 2011). The influence of the moving parts of reform on schools indicates the importance of investigating principals’ perceived roles and specific strategies they employ to implement educational reforms such as Ohio’s Learning Standards and assessments.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to investigate principals’ perceived roles as instructional leaders and the leadership strategies principals use to promote values and school culture, collaboration, professional development, and risk taking as they implement current educational reforms in Northwest Ohio’s secondary schools. Principals must contend with the complexity of the changes thrust upon them (Eiler & D’Amico, 2012; Hallinger 2011; Myers, 2014). Additionally, there is an absence of emphasis generally on rural schools in the educational policy literature from scholars and policymakers (Barrett, Cowen, Toma, & Troske, 2015). Many educators in rural America believe federal education policy is designed for urban and suburban school districts (Johnson, LiBetti-Mitchel, & Rotherham, 2014). This is especially glaring considering educational reform impacts all schools. Almost one quarter of students in America attend a rural school and fifty-seven percent of regular school districts are located in rural areas (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013). It is important to note that this study was not an attempt to place a value judgment on standardized curriculum and assessment reforms such as NCLB, the CCSS, or ESSA.

An investigation of the historical foundation of modern educational reforms will occur in Chapter Two of this study and will include *A Nation at Risk*, *Goals 2000*, NCLB, the CCSS, and the ESSA, which promotes standardized curriculum and assessments (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). The standardized curriculum reform examined in this study is the Common
Core State Standards and state standards adopted in Ohio as Ohio’s Learning Standards. These standards will be presented more fully in Chapter Two.

Principals were interviewed to ascertain their perceived role and the leadership strategies they employed to implement the educational reforms in their buildings. For example, several leadership strategies included instituting organizational goals, promoting a learning environment in the building, and providing professional development training for teachers. Learning strategies utilized by principals inform us of practices that can be effective in implementing Ohio’s Learning Standards in Northwest Ohio public secondary schools. The educational leaders that were studied were principals working in rural public secondary schools in Northwest Ohio.

**Research Questions**

The research questions guiding the current study were:

1) What do principals from secondary schools in Northwest Ohio perceive to be their role as instructional leaders concerning the implementation of Ohio’s Learning Standards and assessments?

2) What leadership strategies do principals utilize to carry out implementation of Ohio’s Learning Standards and assessments in their school environment?

**Theoretical Framework**

This study investigated principals’ perceived roles and strategies they utilized to implement Ohio’s Learning Standards and assessments. Hallinger’s (2011) Leadership for Learning model was the theoretical framework through which data were analyzed. This model was selected because implicit in the framework is the “desire to understand how school principals, and other leaders, shape conditions in the school that directly impact learning outcomes for students” (Hallinger & Wang, 2015, p. 38).
Hallinger (2011) synthesized the instructional leadership and transformational leadership work of several researchers from the last several decades to develop the Leadership for Learning Model (e.g., Bass, 1990; Bossert et al., 1982; Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; Kouzes & Posner, 2002; Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris, & Hopkins, 2006; Pitner, 1988). The term instructional leadership has primarily been used for principals’ practices, but leadership for learning includes a broader range of leadership strategies influencing school improvement and student achievement (Hallinger, 2011). Studies show that leadership does not directly impact student learning but certainly does indirectly impact student achievement through providing a learning environment and motivation for teachers (Hallinger, 2011; Leithwood et al., 2010). Hallinger’s (2011) Leadership for Learning Model, shown in Figure 1 on page 12, provides four collective leadership dimensions of instructional leadership: values leadership, leadership focus, context for leadership, and sharing leadership. In describing the values leadership dimension of the model, Hallinger (2011) cited McCrimmon’s (2004) claim that values leadership refers to Kouzes and Posner’s (2002) five exemplary leadership practices of model the way, inspire a shared vision, challenge the process, enable others to act, and encourage the heart. In the model, values leadership is depicted as beliefs, values, knowledge, and experience. These are shown in boxes on the left hand side with arrows illustrating the impact on leadership. Leadership focus includes the leader’s indirect impact on learning through the avenues of vision and goals, academic structures and processes, and people in the school community (Hallinger, 2011; Hallinger & Heck, 2010; Louis et al., 2010). Additionally, Hallinger (2011) stressed the importance of an effective leader making adjustments to changing conditions in the school. This dimension is found in the center boxes of the model labelled vision.
and goals, academic structures and processes, and people capacity. Context for leadership refers to the need for leaders to utilize the leadership style appropriate for the situation and context of the school and to continually adapt to changes in the school over time (Hallinger, 2011). Hersey, Blanchard and Johnson’s (2001) situational leadership studies lend insight into the context for leadership. Context for leadership is presented in the model by the dimensions around the center boxes: societal culture, institutional system, staff and community characteristics, and school organization. Finally, sharing leadership refers to distributed leadership or the amount of collaboration the principal utilizes depending on the stage in the process of the school’s reform (Leithwood et al., 2006; Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond 2001). This dimension is depicted by the double direction arrows in the model. Some leadership strategies the Leadership for Learning Model underscores include understanding organizational and environmental context to establish vision and goals, the personal characteristics of leaders themselves that provide leadership styles, collaboration, and providing professional development opportunities (Hallinger, 2011). These dimensions will be further investigated in Chapter Two of this study.
Significance of the Study

This study will serve as a guide for educational leaders as they implement twenty-first century educational reforms. Diana Epstein, from the Center for American Progress, stated that educating the youth of America to compete in a global society is vital to the prosperity and future of our nation (2011). Educational reforms of the 21st century including NCLB, CCSS, and ESSA have sought to address American students’ need to be educated for success in a global society. The Ohio Department of Education is currently drafting a response to ESSA focusing on the following areas: academic content standards, standardized assessments, accountability, school improvement, teacher evaluation, and closing the achievement gap for vulnerable students (Ohio Department of Education, 2017). A working draft was issued in February, 2017 with the final report due in September, 2017. Therefore, understanding the role perception of principals and
strategies principals utilize in their buildings to implement these areas of focus is vital. Hallinger (2011) stated that the next generation of research in the field of instructional leadership will need to focus on contextualizing the types of strategies and practices educational leaders utilize in differing contexts. This study intends to provide insight into the strategies utilized by principals in rural Northwest Ohio public secondary schools.

**Working Definitions**

The following list contains terms and definitions used in this study:

*American Institutes for Research (AIR):* Behavioral and social science evaluation organization based in Washington D.C. that developed state tests for Ohio’s seven end of course exams for English I, English II, American History, American Government, Biology or Physical Science for only the 2018 graduating class, Algebra I, and Geometry or Integrated Math I and II.

*A Nation at Risk:* A 1983 report of the National Commission on Excellence in Education (NCEE) that noted the nation’s ills were a result of failing schools and recommended that schools implement improved standards.

*Common Core State Standards:* Content standards in English and Math presented in 2009 through the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) to provide a standardized set of content standards for all students in the United States to be prepared for college or a career. These content standards were the proposed standards for schools to adopt that received Race to the Top federal funds.

*Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA):* became law in 1965 providing federal funds for districts with low income students, textbooks, library books, special education, and
scholarships for low income college students to help state education agencies improve primary and secondary education.

*Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA):* A reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) passed in 2015 to ensure college and career readiness for students by providing rigorous content standards and assessments, protections for disadvantaged and at-risk students, increased access to preschool, support local innovation strategies to improve student achievement, and provide accountability to underperforming schools.

*Indicators Met:* “measures the percent of students who have passed state tests and includes the gifted indicator. Test results are reported for each student in a grade and subject. The passage rate for each indicator is 80%” (Ohio Department of Education, 2017).

*Instructional Leadership:* Leadership qualities principals of effective schools utilize including being strong directive leaders with charisma that set goals by defining a collective vision, building positive culture that motivates teachers and students to achieve high expectations, working hands-on, being engaged with curriculum and instruction, and understanding the context of the school, community, and society.

*Leadership for Learning:* Includes instructional leadership practices of principals with a broader range of leadership strategies that include a leaders’ values, focus on the structures and process of the school, context of the community and society, and sharing leadership to impact school improvement and student achievement.

*No Child Left Behind (NCLB):* A reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) passed by Congress in 2002 to provide for a stronger emphasis on reading, increased accountability for schools and states through state standards and assessments,
greater school choice for parents, and more flexibility for states and school districts and their use of federal money.

*Ohio Department of Education (ODE)*: The administrative and policy making organization in Ohio responsible for primary and secondary education in the state.

*Ohio Teacher Evaluation System (OTES)*: The system developed by the state board of education in Ohio to become compliant with the stipulations presented in Race to the Top federal funding.

*Ohio’s Learning Standards*: The content standards developed and approved by the Ohio state board of education.

*Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC)*: A consortium of states that develop assessments to determine the readiness of students for college and careers.

*Performance Index*: “measures the test results of every student. There are six levels on the index and schools receive points for every student in each of these levels. The higher the achievement level, the more the points awarded in the school's index. This rewards schools and districts for improving the performance of all students, regardless of achievement level” (Ohio Department of Education, 2017)

*Race to the Top*: A federal grant program providing $4.35 billion to states that agreed to adopt federal directed educational reforms with national standards and assessments, develop evaluation systems for teachers and principals, recruit effective teachers and principals, and improve the lowest achieving schools.
Delimitations

The examination of educational leaders’ role perceptions and strategies took place from April 2017 through March 2018. The educational leaders to be interviewed were principals from Northwest Ohio rural public secondary schools. The interviewer attempted to determine decisions the educational leaders planned to make in light of NCLB, CCSS, and ESSA. Phenomenology, which will be discussed more in Chapter Three, is the intentionally selected methodology for this study. It was selected because I wanted to collect data from interviews to identify the experience of the educational leaders and gain insight into their instructional leadership strategies to promote values and school culture, collaboration, and professional development. Additionally, phenomenological methods informed the reasons for the administrators’ actions.

Limitations

The primary limitation in this study included the answers given by principals in the interviews. The principals may have given answers that they perceive to be true, but may not line up with the ever-changing reality of education reform. The challenge was to decipher those answers that were perceptions and what answers reflected reality.

Organization of the Remaining Chapters

Chapter Two will present a review of the literature about educational reform movements in two areas. Specifically, the review will include the historical foundation of the modern educational reform movement in relation to standardized curriculum and assessments and Hallinger’s leadership for learning model. Chapter Three will explain the methodology and validity of phenomenological theory. Chapter Four will provide an analysis and findings of the
data collected. Chapter Five will discuss the conclusions and implications of this study. Finally, a list of references and appendixes will be provided for the reader.
CHAPTER II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Chapter Two will review the two main areas of this study: The modern education reform movement in the United States and instructional leadership. The first major portion of this chapter will begin with a brief review of twenty-first century education reform in the United States particularly focusing on secondary schools. Additionally, this brief review of education reform in the United States will culminate with a review of the Common Core State Standards Initiative (CCSSI) and Ohio’s Learning Standards.

The second major portion of this chapter will be an investigation of educational leader practices. The investigation of educational leader practices will begin with a review of national professional standards for school leaders. The examination will continue with an inquiry into the background of instructional leadership research. Finally, this portion of the literature review will explore the dimensions of instructional leader practices: values leadership, leadership focus, context for leadership, and sources of leadership (Hallinger, 2011).

The Expectations of Principals Today

The expectations of principals have been changing from even a generation ago when principals were expected to be managers of a building responsible for the budget, scheduling, and discipline (Miller, 2015). With the increased emphasis on accountability and utilizing instructional leadership, the need for skillful implementation of reforms to improve student achievement at the building level are crucial (Alvoid & Black, 2014). Some have stated that principals’ job requirements in the twenty-first century requires “ability, energy, commitment, and the ability to walk on water” (National Association of Secondary School Principals & National Association of Elementary School Principals, 2013, p. 10). With the changes of educational reform, several studies have explored the changing expectations of principals.
The Wallace Foundation (2013) identified five key practices principals needed to meet educational reform challenges: “shaping a vision of academic success for all students, creating a climate hospitable to education, cultivating leadership in others, improving instruction, and managing people, data and processes” (p. 6). The five key practices provide insight into the needs schools have for principals, but are general in nature. Lynch (2016) specifically noted several expectations placed on principals as including: communicating effectively to all stakeholders in the building, modeling appropriate behavior, supervising professional development, supporting the development of curriculum and ensuring the high-quality instruction of that curriculum, making sure assessments accurately measure achievement of students and staff, making schedules, managing time, providing student discipline, implementing district policies, maintaining the building, staffing positions, prepare and manage the budget, being politically astute, gaining support from key community members and deal with any other issues that may arise. Concurring, the Department for Professional Employees (DPE) (2016) listed several changing roles for principals including, establishing high expectations for students and teachers, be highly dynamic individuals, able to anticipate unexpected daily events, recruit and retain high-quality teachers, serve as a conduit between the district leadership and staff, use data to develop strategies and goals for academic improvement for the building, engage stakeholders in improving student achievement, obtain resources to aid teachers and students, and perform these tasks with a smaller budget (pp. 4-5). The expectations reveal the challenging nature and importance of principals’ jobs to implement educational reform.

To highlight the concern surrounding the changing environment of educational reform, Alvoid and Black (2014) stated, “these changing expectations, couple with insufficient training and support, have led many principals to the conclusion that the job is no longer sustainable” (p.
Additionally, Alvoid and Black (2014) reported that *New Leaders*, a nonprofit organization that develops educational leaders, found in 2012 that twenty percent of new principals left their positions within two years. After studying one hundred eighty schools in nine states, researchers from the University of Minnesota and the University of Toronto concluded, “We have not found a single case of a school improving its student achievement record in the absence of talented leadership” (Miller, 2015, p. 2). These reports reveal expectations and the importance of meeting the challenges and concerns inherent for principals today.

The absence of educational literature emphasizing rural schools generally and the challenges the leaders of these schools face, impacts the expectations of rural school principals. Three challenges for rural school educational leaders include low Socioeconomic Status, the scarcity of resources, and the high profile nature of a small rural school district (Forner, Bierliein-Palmer, & Reeves, 2012). Additional challenges include funding, staffing, flexibility, regional services administration, and professional development (Yettick, Baker, Wickersham, & Hupfeld, 2014). Specific to staffing challenges, Monk (2007) stated that rural schools tend to offer fewer upper level courses because teachers lack the necessary education. Chuong and Schiess (2016) stated that even those schools that have qualified teachers, there are not enough students to make the course offering feasible. Rural schools face significant challenges to provide effective professional development due to geographic isolation, limited availability of training resources, and lack of support staff [substitute teachers] to allow teachers to leave for professional development (Glover, Nugent, Chumney, Ihlo, Shapiro, Guard, Koziol, & Bovaird 2016). Further, Fishman (2015) stated rural administrators have to wear many hats, have difficulty recruiting quality teachers and “assessing and nurturing” teachers, small amount of federal grant money per student, difficulty applying for grants due to in-house personnel being
required to do the work, and various other state and federal regulations. The U.S. Department of Education (2016) in a study of federal funding for rural schools stated, “Rural schools often face a variety of unique challenges, such as geographic isolation, shortages of qualified educators, limited access to rigorous classes and enrichment activities to prepare students for college, and underdeveloped [technology] infrastructure” (p. 1). Chuong and Schiess (2016) propose that rural schools utilize technology to improve course offerings for students. A challenge still remained, however, as Herold (2015) stated that twenty percent of rural districts cannot access high speed internet fiber optics and when some do get high speed internet access, they often pay more than urban and suburban schools. The literature suggests that principals of rural schools face unique challenges to provide a culture where teachers and students can thrive. The need for quality principals is vital for schools. The difficult job being asked of principals highlights the importance of providing insight into principals’ roles and strategies to successfully implement educational reform.

**Modern Education Reform in the United States**

The focus of the inquiry in this section will be modern education reforms impacting secondary schools in the United States. The investigation will begin with the modern foundational education reforms leading directly to twenty-first century education reform. Specifically, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 will be investigated, followed by an inquiry into the1983 NCEE report, *A Nation at Risk*. Finally, modern education reforms of the twenty-first century will be explored, including the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) and the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).
The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965

The most expansive federal education legislation, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), was passed by the United States Congress on April 9, 1965. As part of President Lyndon B. Johnson’s “War on Poverty”, the legislation focused primarily on providing categorical federal aid to schools with low-income students to help close the achievement gap between low-income and middle to high income students. This federal funding was allocated to states who then distributed the money to the schools with the appropriate entitlement parameters (Elementary and Secondary Education Act, 2015).

Several Titles were included in this federal education reform legislation to emphasize particular educational needs. Title I is a designation for schools with at least forty percent of its student population being in low income status. The money allocation is primarily targeted to public and parochial schools in grades one to six. Schools must show student progress to continue to receive the federal funds. Title II money is focused on school libraries, textbooks, and instructional materials. Title III provides funds for remedial and outside school resources providing additional learning aid to students. Title IV money goes to colleges for research and training for teachers and administrators of all schools. Title V compels state boards of education to support federal reforms and provides funding for the arts, gifted students, and foreign languages. Title VI provides federal grants to aid students with disabilities in schools. Title VII, added to ESEA in 1968, provides funds for improving education for bilingual Hawaiian, Native American and Alaskan students by providing separate language learning conditions (Cohen & Moffitt, 2009; Elementary and Secondary Education Act, 2015; Reese, 2011).

The ESEA (1965) was generally well accepted by the public, K-12 educators, and Democrat and Republican presidents. The increase in federal funds to schools across America
delivered aid; however, its effectiveness was hampered by some problems. One problem occurred with the use of funds being placed in general operating budgets by superintendents and principals. The funds were not used for innovation to improve educational practices to aid disadvantaged children. Another problem included the lack of a national curriculum due to fears of federal intrusion on state and local control of education. Further educational reforms would be enacted by succeeding presidential administrations from both political parties in attempts remedy the problems found in ESEA (1965) with reauthorizations of ESEA to be discussed further below (Cohen & Moffitt, 2009; Mirel & Vinovskis, 2009; Reese, 2011).

A Nation at Risk, 1983

Continuing education reforms from the 1950s and 1960s the Secretary of Education, Terrell Bell created the National Commission on Excellence in Education in 1981 (Goldberg & Harvey, 1983). According to Goldberg and Harvey (1983), two members of the commission, the report “was intended to remind Americans of the importance of Education as a foundation of the United States of leadership in change and technical invention and as the source of U.S. prosperity security and civility” (p. 15).

The commission concluded in the report, A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform, that secondary school curriculum had diminished over the years and presented five general recommendations to stop the decline. The first recommendation involved the number of credits needed to graduate from high school: four years of English, three years of mathematics, three years of science, three years of social studies, and one half year of computer science. Additionally, fine arts, performing arts, and vocational education should also offer rigorous coursework. A second recommendation of the committee included the necessity of schools’ reliance on high school grades to determine academic achievement and testing to
advance to the next school year. Additionally, an upgrade of textbooks and instructional materials was needed. A third broad recommendation stated that the school day and the school year needed to be longer. A fourth broad area concerned teaching. To that end, the following specific recommendations were proposed: persons preparing to teach should be required to meet high standards in academics and competence for teaching, increased salaries for teachers, an eleven month contract for teachers, career ladders cooperatively developed by school boards, administrators, and teachers, and non-school personnel resources should be used to help fill gaps in the school. Additionally, incentives such as grants and loans should be made available to attract top students into the teaching profession. Further, master teachers should be involved in designing teacher preparation programs and supervising new teachers. Finally, the report recommended that citizens across the United States hold elected officials responsible for providing leadership to carry out these recommendations. The result of this report sparked intense debate not experienced since the successful launch of Sputnik I (A Nation at Risk, 1983; Goldberg & Harvey, 1983). The debate following this report and the call for elected officials to be held responsible for education caused some top elected officials in the federal government to take action.

**America 2000**

In 1989, President George Bush and the nation’s governors held an education summit in response to the *A Nation at Risk* report. This conference, attended by all fifty governors including Bill Clinton, then Governor of Arkansas, worked to partner the federal government with state and local communities to develop national educational goals. This commission presented a set of six national goals called America 2000. President Bush proposed the America 2000 Excellence in Education Act to enact the national goals. However, the United States
Congress did not pass the legislation. In 1991, Congress addressed education reform again by creating a National Council on Education Standards and Testing (NCEST). This council recommended national standards by which states could measure student achievement (Congressional Digest, 1997). Additionally, President Bush supported the creation of the New American Schools Development Corporation to create and promote educational reform projects to improve the achievement of at risk students (Mirel & Vinovskis, 2009; Reese, 2011). Not to be outdone, a Democrat president proceeded to promote an additional set of educational reforms.

**Goals 2000: Educate America**

In 1993 President Bill Clinton proposed Goals 2000: Educate America legislation. This law was passed by the United States Congress in 1994 codifying the six national education goals that were adopted in the 1989 education summit. The names of these educational reforms are not the only similar features. President Clinton’s Goals 2000 has the same six goals as President Bush’s America 2000 and added two educational goals (Stedman, Apling & Riddle, 1993).

The goals stated that, by the year 2000:

1. All children will start school ready to learn.
2. The high school graduation rate will be at least 90%.
3. Students will Master a challenging curriculum at grades 4, 8, and 12.
4. Teachers will have access to professional development opportunities.
5. United States students will be the first in the world in science and math achievement.
6. All adults will be literate.
7. Students will be free of drugs, violence, and firearms.
8. Every school will promote parental involvement in education. (Congressional Digest, 1997, p. 259)

Additionally, unlike the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, the Goals 2000: Educate America Act was the first federal legislation to promote national standards and assessments as part of federal funding. The criteria for the curriculum standards included a provision that the U.S. Department of Education would provide a general description of broad knowledge and skills students should know, but did not provide specific curriculum for each subject. Further, performance standards would demonstrate that students were proficient in knowledge and skills that matched the content standards. Finally, the legislation described resources, practices, and conditions that every level of the educational system would provide students. Therefore, every student would have the opportunity to acquire the knowledge and skills that matched the content standards (Congressional Digest, 1997; Heise, 1994; Stedman, Apling & Riddle, 1993).

The top-down orientation of Goals 2000 ran in opposition to the trend in the 1980s for educational matters to be decentralized from the state to the local level, causing major concern for policymakers and education reformers (Heise, 1994). Therefore, provisions in Goals 2000 included language that state participation was voluntary and states would not be required to adopt any specific curriculum in order to receive federal aid. If states chose to adopt the Goals 2000 plan, they would need to develop content and performance standards, state assessments aligned with the standards, and provide professional development for teachers to become familiar with the new standards (Congressional Digest, 1997; Heise, 1994; Stedman, Apling & Riddle, 1993).
President Clinton announced the development of national tests that would measure fourth grade reading and eighth grade math achievement to compare schools in different states. The president posited that these new national assessments would provide benefit to students in an increasingly mobile society (Congressional Digest, 1997; Heise, 1994; Stedman, Apling & Riddle, 1993). Many lawmakers and educational reformers opposed the national tests. The opposition culminated with the passage of the Goodling Amendment of H.R. 2264, a Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act in 1998. The amendment specifically prohibited funding “to field, test, implement, administer, or distribute national tests” (H.R. 2264, 105th Cong., 1998). Three years later, however, federal legislation proposed by a Republican president would reintroduce similar national standards and testing measures in educational reform called No Child Left Behind, 2001.

**No Child Left Behind Act, 2001**

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 built upon the education reforms of the George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton administrations (Mirel & Vinovskis, 2009). President Clinton’s Goals 2000 had similar language including the reasoning that national testing would help states compare themselves in an increasingly mobile society, but NCLB went steps further requiring more standardized testing and accountability measures (Mirel & Vinovskis, 2009; Reese, 2011). Proposed by George W. Bush and passed by the United States Congress in 2001, the legislation embarked twenty-first century education reform as a reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 (Ohio Department of Education, 2015). According to the U.S. Department of Education (2016), NCLB would provide educational reform to promote educational excellence and equity by “raising academic standards for all
students and measuring student achievement to hold schools accountable for educational progress” in a mobile society. NCLB legislation supported states in their task of instituting standards, developing assessment, and accountability measures for school districts. Additionally, NCLB particularly noted that Title I students would receive supports to achieve high standards and teachers had to be highly qualified (Mirel & Vinovskis, 2009; U.S. Department of Education, 2015).

According to NCLB, if states wanted to receive federal funding, a requirement involved implementation of testing every year for their students third through eighth grade in math and reading as well as testing students in the tenth, eleventh or twelfth grade to determine student achievement (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). States would also be held accountable through the public release of Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) test results with consequences to schools that did not achieve their adequate yearly progress (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). The federal mandate provisions of testing and accountability in NCLB created a departure from previous federal education reforms causing the primary focus of schools to be making AYP (Hunt, 2008). Haretos (2005) concurred with the importance of accountability for student proficiency through using AYP, but added that accountability should include student growth measures. Hunt (2008) stated NCLB’s emphasis on standards and high stakes standardized testing shifted the focus of educational reform to the building level and caused a profound impact on administrators (p. 583). Principals focused more on collaborating with teachers to develop instructional strategies that match school improvement plans to meet AYP (Haretos, 2005; Hunt, 2008). These changes created logistical and ethical dilemmas for principals, especially with a lack of funding (Hunt, 2008). As each state proceeded to enact the standards and assessment reforms on an individualized basis, funding issues surfaced and achievement gap problems arose,
especially for students moving from one state to another (Wallender, 2014). Concurring, Houck and Debray (2015) asserted that NCLB’s focus on adequacy based exclusively on test scores called for the need of other kinds of supports.

**American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, 2009**

A remedy for funding issues and achievement gap problems from NCLB appeared in a provision in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, 2009 (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). To stimulate a lagging economy, President Barack Obama signed into law the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) in 2009 (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). Among other economic stimulation provisions, this portion of the legislation, commonly called Race to the Top, provided $4.35 billion in a competitive federal grant program to schools to remedy funding problems with NCLB (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). In exchange for federal funds, states were required to implement four areas of education reform: adopt national standards and assessments for students’ college and career readiness, build data systems that measured student growth and evaluated teachers and principals, recruit effective teachers and principals, and improve the lowest achieving schools (Houck & Debray, 2015; U.S. Department of Education, 2009). Additionally, Secretary of Education Arne Duncan made it clear that in order to be accepted, a State had to adopt internationally benchmarked standards and assessments developed by Achieve, Inc., the National Governors Association, and the Council of Chief State School Officers (Toscano, 2013; U.S. Department of Education, 2009).

In 2010, the U.S. Department of Education published *A Blueprint for Reform*. This document called for a reauthorization of the ESEA to provide a framework or a “blueprint for a re-envisioned federal role [to] build on these key priorities” (U.S. Department of Education, 2016, p. 3). The document provides a detailed design for those states who accepted Race to the
Top funds to use as they implemented the four areas of education reform outlined above with Race to the Top including Common Core State Standards (CCSS), to be discussed below (U.S. Department of Education, 2015).

**Common Core State Standards Initiative**

Twenty-first century legislation enacting education reforms has led to curricula called the Common Core State Standards Initiative (CCSSI), which has been adopted in forty-two states, the District of Columbia, four territories (Guam, American Samoa Islands, U.S. Virgin Islands, Northern Mariana Islands), and the Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA) (CCSSI, 2015). According to the CCSSI website, the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) were developed in 2009 through a partnership of state governors and state commissioners of education from 48 states, two territories, and the District of Columbia. This partnership was made possible through membership in the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) who invited teachers and the public to take part in the development process (CCSSI, 2015; Eilers & D’Amico, 2012).

Toscano (2013) stated the standards were crafted by entrepreneurs, among whom were Bill and Melinda Gates and private Washington-based organizations which created a unique mesh of private and federal entities. A primary goal of the partnership was to provide a set of standardized curriculum standards across the nation. This goal was primary because NCLB required states to develop standards, but they were not standardized across the nation (CCSSI, 2015). To begin the development process, the CCSS were divided into two broad categories: college and career readiness and K-12 standards in English and Mathematics (CCSSI, 2015). The college and career readiness standards were developed by the committee and then integrated into the K-12 standards (CCSSI, 2015). The resulting CCSS are empirically based, clear and
understandable, consistent, measureable, provide college and career readiness, provide rigor in knowledge and critical thinking skills, and informed by curriculum from high performing countries (CCSSI, 2015). Additionally, the CCSSI website stated that the CCSS establish grade band specific goals for students but do not stipulate the manner in which schools and teachers must teach the standards or materials to use for instruction to get students to become college and career ready in a global society (CCSSI, 2015).

The advent of Common Core State Standards raised the awareness of principals to determine how best to move faculty and staff to implement the standards (Eilers & D’Amico, 2012). In a review of the research regarding Common Core and rural children’s school readiness, Bailey (2014) revealed some educational elements impacting principals. First, teachers and principals must utilize collective efforts to improve children’s cognition and learning through curricula and increased family engagement. These partnership efforts result in a positive impact on student achievement. Second, building upon a child’s prior knowledge and utilizing CCSS may be suitable to address learning deficiencies and lack of access to quality curricula (Bailey, 2014). Further, Eilers and D’Amico (2012) stressed the importance of the need for a skilled leader to guide the teachers and students effectively to prevent frustration in this time of educational reform. The practical implications to principals are apparent, however, the CCSS have not been ushered into the American education scene without controversy.

The nationalized standards movement called Common Core has been met by supporters and detractors. Supporters point to the need for nationally based standards to adequately determine achievement across the United States, prepare students for college and careers, and provide consistency in our mobile society (Epstein, 2011; Wallender, 2014). Additionally, supporters point to the apparent emphasis of CCSS on learning processes, rigor, and critical
thinking (Kenna & Russell, 2014; Wallender, 2014). Detractors argue that from studies and polls these shifts in standards cause a lack of teachers’ efficacy as they struggle to implement the new standards (Murphy & Torff, 2014; Gewertz, 2013). Additionally, the issue of top-down educational mandates from the federal government have caused many to be concerned with the loss of state, local and community autonomy over education (Toscano, 2013; Burke, et al., 2013). Further, several states have reported problems and some have pulled out of Race to the Top and the CCSS. Two states, Kentucky and New York, have reported problems with the correlation between the CCSS and the standardized tests (Corona, 2013; Murphy & Torff, 2014). According to the CCSSI website, seven states and one territory have not adopted the CCSS and one, Minnesota, has only adopted the English Language Arts standards. The seven states that have not adopted the CCSS are Alaska, Oklahoma, Texas, South Carolina, Indiana, Virginia, and Nebraska. In response to public concerns about Common Core, several states including Florida and Ohio have provided open dialogue with stakeholders to review their standards and the name Common Core is no longer used. For example, Florida’s standards are called Mathematics Florida Standards (MAFS) and so forth and Ohio’s standards are called Ohio’s Learning Standards (Florida Department of Education, 2017; Ohio Department of Education, 2017). However, the actual standards in Florida and Ohio do discuss Common Core. The next portion of this chapter will include the federal government response to the controversy surrounding NCLB and the CCSS.

**Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015**

The U.S. Department of Education (2015) stated, that “NCLB represented a significant step for our nation’s children in many respects, particularly as it shined a light on where students were making progress and where they needed additional support, regardless of race, income, zip
code, disability, home language, or background”. The U.S. Department of Education (2015) continued to state that more work needed to be done to accomplish the educational goals of the United States. The federal government also responded to the concerns of state governments and Americans across the nation regarding *A Blueprint for Reform* with specific concerns regarding the Common Core State Standards Initiative (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). The United States Congress passed and President Obama signed a No Child Left Behind revision called Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in December 2015 (Korte, 2015). The law revised not only NCLB, but also the Common Core State Standards adoption. Specifically, ESSA keeps federal mandated testing for mathematics and reading, but allows states to determine performance standards (Davis, 2015). Additionally, the law specifically prohibits the federal government from requiring specific academic content standards such as the Common Core State Standards, but states must adopt nationally recognized standards and assessments (Korte, 2015). The focus of ESSA is to provide flexibility to states while keeping federal guidelines. Ohio, the location of the present study, is one of forty-two states granted ESEA flexibility and is undergoing a process of review with a finalized plan to be submitted to the U. S. Department of Education in April, 2017 (Ohio Department of Education, 2017). The present study focused on Ohio principals and their experience with educational reform especially now with ESSA and Ohio’s revision process underway. Therefore, Ohio’s Learning Standards will be investigated in the next portion of this chapter.

**Ohio’s Learning Standards**

A requirement of accepting Race to the Top funds was accepting national curriculum standards and assessments with the Common Core State Standards being the only curriculum standards available at the time of states’ accepting Race to the Top funds (Toscano, 2013). Ohio
was one of the states that accepted Race to the Top money and adopted the CCSS in English Language Arts and Mathematics in June 2010 (Ohio Department of Education, 2017). Ohio does not use the name “Common Core State Standards”, but instead calls the standards, “Ohio’s Learning Standards”. CCSS apply only to English Language Arts and Math. Therefore, Ohio developed parallel learning standards also called Ohio’s Learning Standards in science, social studies, fine arts, world languages, and several other subjects based on international benchmarks that are rigorous and geared to college and career readiness (Ohio Department of Education, 2017). In 2013, Ohio’s New Next Generation Standards were adopted in Science, Social Studies and fine arts along with standardized assessments aligned to the new standards (Ohio Department of Education, 2017). Ohio’s Learning Standards in English and Math went through a revision process in 2016 accepting the content revisions on February 22, 2017. The revising process for the English and Math standards included developing instructional strategies and tools throughout 2017 to aid teachers as they transition to the new standards in the 2017-2018 school year. Completing the revision process, the state board adopted the revised English and Math content standards in February 2018 and posted them on the Ohio Department of Education’s website on February 27, 2018. Concurrently, Ohio’s Learning Standards in Science and Social Studies were undergoing a revision process beginning with a review of the content standards in 2017, seeking comments and suggestions from Ohio educators through the 2017-2018 school year, and implementation in the 2018-2019 school year (Ohio Department of Education, 2018).

The focus of the present study is implementation of CCSS. Ohio has chosen to expand its focus into other content standards and not solely focus on Common Core content. Therefore, all of Ohio’s Learning Standards will be further explained below. When accessing Ohio’s Learning Standards for English Language Arts, the introduction clearly states that these standards are
Common Core State Standards and outlines the establishment of the CCSS described above. A summary of the Ohio’s Learning Standards expectations for students that are college and career ready in the English Language Arts follows. Students will be able to demonstrate independence of learning, build strong content knowledge, adapt their communication to fit their audience and circumstance, comprehend and critique author’s bias, assumptions, and validity, value evidence to support theses, use technology and digital media strategically and capably, and understand other perspectives and cultures (Ohio’s New Learning Standards in English Language Arts, 2010, p. 7).

Similarly, Ohio’s Learning Standards in Mathematics begin with an explanation that the standards deliver on the promises of “common standards” and “these Standards aim for clarity and specificity” (Ohio’s New Learning Standards in Mathematics, 2010, p. 3). Further the standards set an expectation of understanding that intersects Mathematical content and practice. A synopsis of Ohio’s Learning Standards in Mathematics follows. Students will be able to make sense of problems and persevere in solving them, reason abstractly and quantitatively, construct viable arguments and critique the reasoning of others, model with mathematics, use appropriate tools strategically, attend to precision, look for and make use of structure, look for and express regularity in repeated reasoning (Ohio’s New Learning Standards in Mathematics, 2010, pp. 7-8).

Comparable to Ohio’s Learning Standards in English Language Arts and Math, Ohio’s Science Standards are internationally and nationally benchmarked with input from stakeholders and academic experts. In summary, Ohio’s Learning Standards in Science state that high school students will be able to understand scientific explanations of the natural world, differentiate science from pseudo-science, understand the make-up and progress of scientific knowledge,
utilize scientific procedures, and utilize twenty-first century skills. Additionally, students are expected to utilize scientific inquiry to discover the workings of the natural world through the following process. Identify proper questioning practices, research known information, develop a plan of investigation, use appropriate tools to gather data, interpret and evaluate data, develop explanations, and communicate the results of the investigation (Ohio’s New Learning Standards in Science, 2011, pp. 3-6).

Ohio’s Learning Standards in Social Studies, unlike Ohio’s Learning Standards in English Language Arts, Math, and Science, were not internationally benchmarked. They were developed by the Ohio Department of Education (ODE) in coordination with academic content experts and educational stakeholders. Ohio’s Learning Standards in Social Studies generally focus on student’s learning history, geography, government, and economics to prepare them to be productive citizens while learning to utilize twenty-first century skills. The standards specifically state that students will learn about people, places, and events of the past to understand the present, learn skills to make informed and reasoned decisions for themselves and the common good, and participate in their communities in a diverse and democratic society. Additionally, Ohio’s Learning Standards in Social Studies created syllabi for six high school courses; American History, Modern World History, American Government, Economics and Financial Literacy, Contemporary World Issues, and World Geography (Ohio’s New Learning Standards in Social Studies, 2010, pp. 3-4).

Ohio’s Learning Standards in Financial Literacy includes students’ ability to analyze, manage, and communicate financial situations that impact them personally. More specifically, the standards state that students will be able to plan for their financial future, discuss money
situations, and make financial decisions based on life events and the general economy (Ohio’s New Learning Standards in Financial Literacy, 2012).

Ohio’s Learning Standards in Fine Arts for dance, drama/theatre, music and visual art include three learning processes. The first learning process is perceiving/knowing/creating. This learning process includes receiving and processing sensory information, place information in cultural and historical context, and drawing from information and experiences to prepare to create. The second learning process is producing/performing. Included in this process is thinking creatively, hands-on work, utilizing physical skills, and communication. The third learning process in Fine Arts is responding/reflecting. Specific actions include critical thinking tasks including analysis, synthesis, and evaluation of their own work and the work of others (Ohio’s Learning Standards in Fine Arts, 2012).

The National Association of Sport and Physical Education (NASPE) standards were adopted by ODE as Ohio’s Learning Standards in Physical Education. The standards were developed to ensure students understand and apply physical education concepts to their daily lives. Specific physical education concepts include making informed decisions to live a healthy lifestyle, be physically active over a lifetime, and adopt behaviors that lead to healthy living (Ohio’s New Learning Standards in Physical Education, 2007).

Ohio’s Learning Standards in Technology were developed by content experts and stakeholders based on international and national technology standards. Ohio’s Learning Standards in Technology state that students will be able to understand the scope and characteristics of technology, recognize the social interaction and ethical use of technology, develop multimedia projects, collaborate in real time with others in distance learning, use technology tools to expand knowledge, solve problems using different approaches, and
understand their role in a complex technological world. Additionally, Ohio’s Learning Standards in Technology state that the technology standards should be utilized in a cross-curricular manner. Other content areas should utilize these technological standards to provide all students the opportunity to apply technology skills in all areas (Ohio’s New Learning Standards in Technology, 2003).

Ohio’s Learning Standards in World Languages are divided into two primary standards called communication and culture. The communication standard includes interpretive, interpersonal and presentational. Interpretive communication involves students understanding the culture and basic elements of reading or hearing a world language including the main idea, relevant details, and meaning. Interpersonal communication includes students’ communication exchange in a world language in spoken or written form. Presentational communication includes students presenting informational content to audiences in a world language. The second standard, culture, includes understanding the practices and perspectives of other cultures, comparing cultures, become globally competent, and participate in communities of other cultures (Ohio’s New Learning Standards in World Languages, 2012).

Ohio has also develop learning standards for students with cognitive disabilities. These standards are called Ohio’s Learning Standards Extended. The Office for Exceptional Children and Office of Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment developed the standards based on similar standards in North Carolina and Delaware to provide a way for students with disabilities to demonstrate learning while maintaining rigor. An Individualized Education Program (IEP) team, utilizing federal guidelines, determines students’ placement. Students fitting into this category comprise approximately 1 percent of Ohio’s student population, are instructed according to Ohio’s Learning Standards Extended, and will take the Alternative Assessment for Students with
Significant Cognitive Disabilities (AASCD). The standards do not replace Ohio’s Learning Standards but are meant to complement the standards by reducing in “breadth and depth” from Ohio’s Learning Standards and are listed from most complex to least complex (Ohio Department of Education, 2012).

**Professional Standards for Educational Leaders**

This section will include an investigation into the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (2015). Then an inquiry into the background of instructional leadership will be examined, followed by an exploration of the dimensions of instructional leadership.

The investigation into the roles to be played by principals begins with Professional Standards for Educational Leaders. The National Policy Board for Educational Administration (NPBEA) created the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) in the mid-1990s to be organized and directed by the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO). The assignment of the ISLLC was to establish the first set of national standards for educational leaders. Forty-five states and the District of Columbia had adopted the leadership standards or a framework of the standards between 1996 and 2005. The Standards were developed based on three sources: empirical evidence of effective leadership practices in high-performing schools, the practical experience of educational leaders, and values such as equity and ethical conduct (Canole & Young, 2013; National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015). Hallinger and Murphy’s (1985) instructional leadership framework was prominent in the establishment of the ISLLC Standards (Neumerski, 2010).

The 1996 leadership standards were enhanced in 2008 through important research studies such as an ISLLC 2004 report called *How Leadership Influences Student Learning*. Leithwood, Seashore, Anderson, and Whalstrom (2004) detailed direct and indirect leadership practices that
impacted student learning in that report. Further, a 2006 report for the Wallace Foundation entitled *Leadership for Learning: Making Connections Among State, District, and School Policies and Practices*, recognized the importance of setting clear expectations for leaders and holding them accountable for the outcomes. Finally, in a 2007 Wallace Foundation report called *A Bridge to School Reform* and supported by the research of Marzano, Waters, and McNulty, (2005), identified a correlation between school educational leadership and student achievement (as cited in Canole & Young, 2013). The 2008 Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium Standards for School Leaders were, in short: vision, mission and goals, teaching and learning, managing organizational systems and safety, collaborating with families and stakeholders, ethics and integrity, and the education system. (Canole & Young, 2013)

The most recent update of the ISLLC Standards was presented in 2015 by the National Policy Board for Educational Administration (NPBEA). A consortium of professional organizations including the American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education (AACTE), the American Association of School Administrators (AASA), the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP), the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP), the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP), the National Council of Professors of Educational Administration (NCPEA), the National School Boards Association (NSBA), and the University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA). Additionally, the public was invited to provide insights into two drafts of the Standards. Formerly called ISLLC Standards, the new standards are called the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders and are designed to “ensure that educational leaders are ready to meet effectively the challenges and opportunities of the job today and in the future as education, schools, and society continue to transform” (National Policy
Board for Educational Administration, p. 1, 2015). More specifically, the 2015 standards provide a clearer emphasis on principals’ leadership strategies that impact student learning and prepare students for the twenty-first century (NPBEA, 2015).

The drive for the 2015 updates was provided by the culture of accountability and student achievement promoted by federal and state educational reform including the Common Core State Standards, Race to the Top, and Every Student Succeeds Act and are to be utilized by all educational leaders (NPBEA, 2015). The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) were developed by a consortium led by the National Governors Association (NGA) and the CCSSO. The CCSS provided clearer, more rigorous standards for English Language Arts and Mathematics to prepare students to be college and career ready when they graduate from high school. Concurrently, a $4.35 billion education grant opportunity called Race to the Top was presented to the States by President Barack Obama. States had the opportunity to apply for the federal funds in exchange for complying with educational reforms. The educational policies and process for implementation were outlined in a Blueprint for Reform. The policies States had to implement included adopting national standards called the CCSS, developing standardized assessments, developing data systems to track student and teacher growth, and support teachers and administrators to be more effective. The Standards have been adopted by forty-two states and five territories. Following discontent with CCSS and the top-down approach of Race to the Top, the Every Student Succeeds Act was passed in 2015. This legislation called for more flexibility in the states concerning standardized testing, performance standards, and national based standards. The national scope of these events provided the catalyst to revisit principals’ standards reviewed below (NPBEA, 2015).

The Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (2015) are summarized as follows:
1. Mission, Vision, and Core Values. Effective educational leaders develop, advocate, and enact a shared mission, vision, and core values of high-quality education and academic success and well-being of each student.

2. Ethics and Professional Norms. Effective educational leaders act ethically and according to professional norms to promote each student's academic success and well-being.

3. Equity and Cultural Responsiveness. Effective educational leaders strive for equity of educational opportunity and culturally responsive practices to promote each student's academic success and well-being.

4. Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment. Effective educational leaders develop and support intellectually rigorous and coherent systems of curriculum, instruction, and assessment to promote each student's academic success and well-being.

5. Community of Care and Support for Students. Active educational leaders cultivate an inclusive, caring, and supportive School community that promotes the academic success and well-being of each student.

6. Professional Capacity of School Personnel. Effective educational leaders developed a professional capacity and practice of school Personnel to promote each student's academic success and well-being.

7. Professional Community for Teachers and Staff. Effective educational leaders Foster a professional community of teachers and other professional staff to promote each student's academic success and well-being.
8. Meaningful Engagement of Families and Community. Effective educational leaders engage families in the community in meaningful, reciprocal, and mutual beneficial ways to promote each student's academic success and well-being.

9. Operations and Management. Effective educational leaders manage School operations and resources to promote each student's academic success and well-being.

10. School Improvement. Effective educational leaders act as agents of continuous improvements to promote each student's academic success and well-being. (NPBEA, 2015, pp. 9-18)

It is the stated intent of the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (2015) that the standards would be utilized by all educational leaders among whom are principals, assistant principals, and teacher leaders (NPBEA, 2015). Additionally, the NPBEA (2015) stated that the standards are best used to inform and influence the development of policy and practice of educational leaders or determine the role principals should play in the school. The Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (2015) are based prominently on the instructional leadership dimensions and have provided a common vision for effective educational leadership in states across the country (Canole & Young, 2013; NPBEA, 2015). Therefore, the next section of this paper will investigate the background and dimensions of instructional leadership.

**Instructional Leadership**

I will be discussing instructional leadership as it has evolved over the last five decades. This discussion will be organized in the effective schools movement, transformational leadership, and three instructional leadership models: Bossert et al.’s (1982) Instructional Management Role of the Principal, Hallinger and Murphy’s (1985) PIMRS Instructional
Leadership Model, and Hallinger’s (2010) Leadership for Learning Model. Each will be discussed below.

Instructional leadership studies begin in the United States in the mid-1900s based on the theoretical work of Bridges (1967) when he stated, “the principal has been exhorted to exert instructional leadership” (p. 136). Further, Bridges (1967) stated that the problems with the imperative were two-fold. First, the elements and assumptions of a principal’s position had not been defined or made clear. Second, a tension existed (and exists) between the recommendations for principals to be instructional leaders and the pragmatic realities of leading schools. Additionally, researchers concluded that additional studies would require the investigation of defining instructional leadership as a “practice based” term as well as investigating methods to resolve the tension between theory and reality of instructional leadership (Bossert, Dwyer, Rowan, & Lee, 1982; Bridges, 1967; Erickson, 1979; Hallinger, 2005).

**Effective Schools Movement**

Research into instructional leadership in the 1960s and 1970s provided a mixture of principal practice but could not truly define principal practices or implementation in schools (Bossert et al., 1982; Hallinger & Wang, 2015). Erickson’s (1979) review of educational leadership research, however, was significant to educational organizations and important to propel further research into what is known as the effective schools movement of the 1980s. Edmonds (1979), a prominent educational leadership researcher and the father of the effective schools movement stated, “in the improving schools, the principal is more likely to be an instructional leader, more assertive in his/her institutional leadership role, more of a disciplinarian, and perhaps most of all, assumes responsibility for the evaluation of the achievement of basic objectives” (p. 18). Upon further research, he posited five Correlates of
Effective Schools stating that all effective schools contained the following five factors: “The principal’s leadership and attention to the quality of instruction, a pervasive and broadly understood instructional focus, an orderly, safe climate conducive to teaching and learning, teacher behaviors that convey the expectation that all students are expected to obtain at least minimum mastery, the use of measures of pupil achievement as the basis for program evaluation” (Edmonds, 1982, p. 1).

Early effective schools research resulted in five Correlates of the Effective Schools movement:

All children can learn and come to school motivated to do so, schools control enough of the variables to assure that virtually all students do learn, schools should be held accountable for measured student achievement, schools should disaggregate measured student achievement in order to be certain that students, regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status are successfully learning the intended school curriculum, the internal and external stakeholders of the individual school are the most qualified and capable people to plan and implement the changes necessary to fulfill the Learning for All mission (Lezotte, 1991, p. 3).

Conclusions of the effective schools research caused several state departments of education to encourage their school districts to adopt school improvement plans based on effective schools research (Edmonds, 1982). Edmonds (1982) reported five major United States cities, New York, Milwaukee, Chicago, New Haven, and St. Louis, utilizing effective schools correlates. The effective schools movement was summed up by Edmonds (1979): “We can,
whenever and wherever we choose, successfully teach all children whose schooling is of interest to us” (p. 23).

Simultaneous to early effective schools research, the Secretary of Education, Terrence Bell, established a commission in 1982 to investigate the status of schools in the United States culminating in the seminal report entitled *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* (Goldberg & Harvey, 1983). This report published in 1983 provided the foundation for the modern political education reform movement because it illustrated the problems in education in America and caused alarm and serious debate about education not encountered since the successful launch of *Sputnik* in 1958 (Goldberg & Harvey, 1983). The effective schools research already being conducted provided tangible solutions for federal and state policymakers to implement reforms and renewed the need for conceptual models to translate leadership principles into concrete activities principals can use and the need for research to provide training for principals (Bossert et al., 1982; Hallinger & Wang, 2015).

Additional research within the effective schools movement has refined and expanded the Correlates of Effective Schools from five to seven: “instructional leadership, clear and focused mission, safe and orderly environment, climate of high expectations, frequent monitoring of student progress, positive home-school relations, opportunity to learn and student time on task” (Lezotte, 1991; Hallinger & Wang, 2015). Specific to instructional leadership, the focus of the present study, researchers of the effective schools movement characterized successful instructional leaders as being engaged in curriculum and instructional measures while working with teachers directly and being present and visible in the classroom (Bossert et al., 1982; Erickson, 1979; Horng & Loeb, 2010). More specifically, principals’ actions as instructional leaders communicate the school’s mission consistently and effectively to all stakeholders and
make sure there is a shared sense of purpose (Lezotte, 2001). Instructional leadership is not the only component to effective schools, but the bodies of research identified instructional leadership as a primary factor in effective schools and gained prominence in educational leadership studies (Bossert et al., 1982; Hallinger & Wang, 2015).

**Instructional Management Role of the Principal Model**

Building on Edmonds (1979, 1982) and effective schools research, the Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development in San Francisco, led by Stephen Bossert (1982) with concurrent work by Hallinger and Murphy (1985), conducted studies specific to instructional leadership in schools (Hallinger & Wang, 2015). These empirical investigations provided additional insight into the characteristics of instructional leadership and offered conceptual models of instructional leadership lacking from previous research (Bossert et al., 1982; Hallinger & Wang, 2015; Hallinger & Murphy, 1985). Additionally, these studies were focused specifically on clarifying the definition of instructional leadership and ways instructional leadership could be utilized by principals in schools (Hallinger & Heck, 2009; Neumerski, 2010).

Bossert and colleagues (1982) focused on the instructional management role of principals’ ability to lead their schools. The model developed at the Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development proposed four levels of variables: organizational context (community and school), principal leadership and personal characteristics, school processes, and student achievement (Bossert et al., 1982; Hallinger & Heck, 2009). The school and community context, made up of district and external characteristics, influence principal management behavior. In turn, principal management behavior impacts the school’s organizational processes, made up of school climate and instructional organization. The school’s organizational processes directly impact student learning through teacher behavior, social relationships, and students’
learning experiences (Bossert et al., 1982). A more detailed description moving left to right of the instructional management role of the principal follows Figure 2.

Figure 2. Adapted from Instructional Management Role of the Principal (Bossert, et al., 1982, p. 40).

The first level of variables, on the left hand side of the model, affect the principals’ instructional management. These variables are personal characteristics of the principal, the institutional context, and community characteristics. Bossert et al. (1982) considered three personal characteristics as gender, training, and experience. The institutional context includes informal activities including exchanging advice and information among teachers and specialists and incentive systems in the school. The community characteristics include several external factors including district finances, parents, minority populations, socio-economic scale, and legal constraints (Bossert, et al., 1982).

The second level of variables, the center box of the model, is principal management behavior described through power, authority, and influence. Bossert et al. (1982) defined power
as “inducing people to behave in ways that they otherwise would not” (p. 49). Additionally, they stated that power is gained through controlling physical, material, and symbolic resources. Regarding authority, Bossert et al. (1982) favored using the concept of negotiation and collaboration between the leader and subordinates for instructional management because it allows the possibility that principals utilize informal means to obtain desired teacher behavior. In order to gain influence, a combination of power and authority is necessary (Bossert et al. 1982). The principals’ effective influence may depend on the ways principals utilize resources needed by teachers and demonstrates successful leadership during times of uncertainty. Influence activities may include providing strong leadership, emphasizing basic skills, instilling expectations of high achievement, direct funds to support professional development, and lobbying district administrators for support. These activities shape the school organizational processes (Bossert et al. 1982).

The third level of variables, to the right of the principal instructional management box in the model, are learning climate and instructional organization. According to the model, principals directly exercise leadership on these variables. Learning climate, as defined by Bossert et al., (1982) is the intuitive sense or feel of an organization. School climate impacts innovation and change positively when principals make sure teachers feel involved and committed to that change (Bossert et al., 1982). Additionally, school level decisions and policies made by the principal provide a general school learning climate that supports classroom environments that emphasize student achievement. Edmonds (1979) found school climate emphasizing student achievement has been found to be an element of an effective school (Bossert et al., 1982).

Instructional organization, the second factor principals directly exercise leadership on, is defined as time, class size and composition, and grouping (Bossert et al., 1982). Time is the
amount of instructional time provided the students throughout the school day and school year. Class size and composition are determined by the principal and impact the ways teachers organize their classroom instruction (Bossert et al., 1982). Grouping may include the ways students are organized into classes and/or the way teachers are organized in teams or departments. Time, class size and composition, and grouping have all been found to directly impact student learning (Bossert et al. 1982).

The fourth level of variables, on the far right side of the model, is student outcomes. According to the model, learning climate and instructional organization directly influence student outcomes. Bossert et al.’s (1982) research shows principals’ indirect influence on student learning through learning climate and instructional organization. The conclusions of studies utilizing this model concur have shown a direct relationship between school leadership and school improvement especially promoting teacher learning and capacity (Leithwood et al., 2004, Robinson & Timperley, 2007). However, the issue of causality and educational leaders’ impact on student achievement over time had not been answered (Hallinger & Heck 2009).

Additionally, this model influenced educational leadership research in the 1980s and 1990s (Hallinger & Wang, 2015). Hallinger and Wang (2015) noted that Bossert and colleagues’ use of the term instructional management has been replaced by the term instructional leadership by most researchers and practitioners.

**PIMRS Instructional Leadership Model**

The results of the related studies included finding the characteristics of principals’ instructional leadership roles in effective schools (Bossert et al., 1982; Hallinger & Wang, 2015; Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008). The characteristics included being strong, directive leaders, setting goals by defining a clear and collective vision. Additionally, characteristics included
being culture builders who motivated students and teachers to achieve high expectations, achieving results through influence and hands-on work, and possessing personal qualities of charisma. Further, the principals’ characteristics included being engaged with curriculum and instruction in the classroom, being focused on coordinating curriculum and instruction with monitored outcomes, and understanding the context of the school and community (Bossert et al., 1982; Hallinger, 2005; Hallinger & Wang, 2015).

Bossert, et al.’s (1982) conceptual model and Hallinger and Murphy’s (1985) complementary model comprised the two predominant models of instructional leadership in the 1980s (Hallinger & Wang, 2015). The model I will focus on next is the Principal Instructional Management Framework proposed by Hallinger and Murphy (1985) (see Figure 3 on page fifty-one). This model has been the most frequently used in empirical studies for the last thirty years and it influenced the ISLLC Standards for School leaders (Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Hallinger & Wang, 2015; Neumerski, 2012). Concurrently, Hallinger and Murphy (1985) developed the Principal Instructional Management Rating Scale (PIMRS) to provide an instrument to gather data on principals’ use of the components of instructional leadership (Hallinger & Wang, 2015; Neumerski, 2010). The PIMRS Instructional Leadership Model includes three dimensions of educational leadership. The first dimension, defining the school mission, has two functions concerning the principal’s role of framing and communicating the school’s goals. The second dimension, managing the instructional program, includes three functions of the principal to coordinate the curriculum, supervise and evaluate instruction, and monitor student progress. The third dimension, developing the school learning climate program, includes five principal functions of protecting instructional time, providing incentives for teachers, providing incentive
for learning, promoting professional development, and maintaining high visibility (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; Hallinger & Wang, 2015).

The first dimension of the model, defining the school mission, refers to the principal consistently communicating the vision and goals of the school to the staff and students in a manner that promotes a collective sense of purpose focused on academic achievement (Hallinger & Wang, 2015; Hallinger & Murphy, 1985). Hallinger and Murphy (1985) defined vision as the general direction the principal wants the school to move toward. In contrast, goals are the specific targets to be achieved on the journey to achieve the vision (Hallinger & Wang, 2015). Vision and goals can impact the school primarily through the principal inspiring the staff to achieve a collective goal. Transformational leadership underscores the inspirational

Figure 3. Adapted from PIMRS Instructional Leadership Model Conceptual Framework (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985, p. 221; Hallinger & Wang, 2015, p. 28).
importance and power of vision (Leithwood, 1994; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1999; Leithwood, 2004; Louis, et al., 2010). The mission of the school is communicated through the two functions of framing and communicating the goals of the school. Framing the school goals entails an emphasis on a few goals that the school community can focus energy and resources toward achieving. The few goals should be coordinated throughout the school, manageable, and incorporate data to inform instruction. Additionally, according to contingency leadership research, goals could be established by the principal or in collaboration with stakeholders. An instructional leader can communicate the goals in formal and informal formats including reviewing with staff in meetings, bulletin boards, memos, parent conferences, and assemblies, all on a regular consistent basis. In summary, an instructional leader’s role takes on several characteristics regarding the mission. It is absolutely clear, focused on academic achievement, define specific priority work for teachers, accepted as legitimate by teachers, articulated, actively supported and modeled by the principal (Hallinger & Wang, 2015; Hallinger & Heck, 1985).

A second dimension of the PIMRS Instructional Leadership Model, managing the instructional program, involves the principal and other leaders coordinating and controlling curriculum and instruction. This model frames the principal as the primary leader of coordinating and controlling the academic processes of the school. Additionally, this model presents three functions of instructional leaders to coordinate the curriculum, supervise and evaluate instruction, and monitor student progress. These functions require the principal to have proficiency with teaching and learning, and commitment to school achievement. The first function of instructional leaders to manage the instructional program, coordinating curriculum, primarily includes the alignment of school curriculum with achievement tests. Additionally, coordination of curriculum includes continuity across grade levels supported by collaboration
among teachers of the school involving curriculum and instruction. The second function, supervising and evaluating instruction, includes coordinating teacher’s objectives with formal and informal evaluation of classroom instruction. However, this function primarily accentuates principals providing resources to increase the instructional capacity of teachers. The third function of managing the instructional framework is monitoring student progress. Effective schools utilize data from standardized assessments to analyze strengths and weaknesses. Principals foster monitoring of student progress through instructional leadership strategies including providing teachers with test results and interpretive analysis in a timely manner, discuss test results with teacher groups and individuals in a concise form (Hallinger & Wang, 2015; Hallinger & Heck, 1985).

The third dimension of the PIMRS instructional leadership model is developing the school learning climate. Principals impact student learning by empowering teachers to provide classroom instruction with proficiency and competence. Additionally, instructional leaders play a crucial role in the organization and climate of a school due to hierarchical position alone. Five functions of instructional leaders promote the organizational structure and climate of a school. The first function of developing the school learning climate, protecting instructional time, involves principals providing uninterrupted preparation and classroom instruction time for teachers. School wide policies limiting interruptions to class time including announcements, office requests, and student meetings greatly improve teacher’s effectiveness. The second function, providing incentives for teachers, fosters a positive climate when instructional leaders promote monetary and non-monetary rewards. Salary schedules and tenure limits monetary rewards principals can provide. Principals may, however, provide non-monetary rewards including private and public recognition, awards, and honors. The third function of developing
the school learning climate is providing incentives for learning. Principals can not only reward teachers for exceptional work, but also students. Molding a school climate of achievement involves utilizing strategies including providing public recognition to students for academic success and improvement. The fourth function, promoting professional development, includes the principal providing learning opportunities in the building and outside the building. Professional development linked to the school’s goals is most effective. Robinson et al. (2008) found that principals’ promotion and participation in staff development produced the greatest effect on student learning. The final function of developing the school learning climate is maintaining high visibility. Informal interactions of principals provides the opportunity to promote school priorities, obtain information, and increase interaction with students. The benefits of high visibility also can result in positive attitudes and behaviors of teachers and students (Bossert et al., 1982; Hallinger & Wang, 2015; Hallinger & Heck, 1985).

In a review for the American Educational Research Association, Hallinger (2008) investigated twenty-five years of research using the PIMRS. The findings revealed that 119 doctoral studies explicitly used the PIMRS instructional leadership perspective to study principal leadership. Of those studies, fifty-nine occurred at the elementary school level with 33 at the secondary level. The remaining studied a mixture of superintendents, cross levels, and middle schools. Replication of the initial study by Hallinger and Murphy (1985) by many researchers found the PIMRS to be reliable and valid (Hallinger & Wang, 2015). Sixteen studies investigated the relationship between gender and principal instructional leadership finding that women more actively utilized instructional leadership. Thirty-six studies examined the relationship between instructional leadership and school effectiveness. The results were largely inconclusive revealing a lack of sophistication, with the limitations likely hiding the indirect effects of principals on
student outcomes. Although the PIMRS has been widely utilized and been found to be valid and reliable, theoretical models and statistical tests have not reflected general trends in education including principal’s distribution of leadership and rural secondary schools context (Hallinger & Wang, 2015). Further, Hallinger, Wang, and Chen (2013) conducted a meta-analysis of reliability studies using the PIMRS in the United States and twenty-six countries. The analysis included forty-three independent empirical studies using the PIMRS. Their conclusions were the same as the Hallinger 2008 review – after thirty years, the PIMRS instrument meets the high standards of reliability and is current (Hallinger et al. 2013).

Transformational Leadership

Bossert et al.’s (1982) and Hallinger and Murphy’s (1985) conceptual frameworks, developed through research in the 1980s, became a springboard for further research (Hallinger & Wang, 2015). Continued research on principal leadership was conducted by Ken Leithwood at Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) beginning in the 1980s and continued through the 1990s and 2000s. Leithwood and colleagues’ substantial research focused on adapting transformational leadership research from Bass (1985), Bass and Avolio (1994) and Burns (1978) conducted for the business world to educational leadership (Hallinger, 2003; Hallinger & Wang, 2015; Leithwood 1994). Transformational leadership research and its application in schools took center stage in the 1990s (Hallinger & Wang, 2015). Leithwood (1994) concluded that transformational leadership in schools stresses principals’ impact on teacher effects, commitment, perceptions, and group goals. Additional research concluded that transformational leaders utilize distributed leadership typified by dispersing leadership across a wide group of people, making context-based decisions, being flexible, requiring a high tolerance for ambiguity, and leading a messy change process (Hallinger, 2003; Jackson, 2000; Leithwood & Jantzi,
Hallinger (2003) stated that transformational leadership focused on vision building and
developing capacity, but did not propose direct engagement with teaching and learning, a core
element of instructional leadership. Additionally, Robinson et al.’s (2008) meta-analysis of
leadership models concluded that the impact of instructional leadership on student outcomes was
greater than transformational leadership (p. 658). Robinson et al.’s (2008) conclusions regarding
transformational and instructional leadership will be more fully explained below. However, one
of the primary burdens of principals is attempting to carry the responsibility alone and
transformational leadership provides strategies to lighten the burden through shared leadership
(Hallinger, 2003, Marks & Printy, 2003; Robinson et al., 2008). Hallinger (2003) and Robinson
et al. (2008) proposed that transformational leadership is part of instructional leadership.
Similarly, Marks and Printy (2003) concluded that instructional leadership is a necessary element
in transformational leadership. Therefore, Hallinger (2003) posited an integrated perspective for
principals that includes both transformational and instructional leadership to assist principals to
improve school performance.

**Leadership for Learning**

Developments in educational reform including No Child Left Behind, Race to the Top,
and Every Student Succeeds Act focused accountability for schools’ performance on principals.
Specifically, Race to the Top mandated replacing administrators and teachers in failing schools
(U.S. Department of Education, 2015). The focus on principals’ accountability and professional
standards, based on instructional leadership, resulted in Hallinger’s (2011) synthesizing the
instructional leadership and transformational leadership work of several researchers from the last
few decades to develop the Leadership for Learning Model (see, e.g., Bass, 1990; Bossert et al.,
1982; Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; Kouzes & Posner, 2002; Leithwood
et al., 2006; Marks & Printy, 2003; Robinson, et al., 2008). The Leadership for Learning Model “provides a wide-angle lens for viewing the contribution that leadership makes to school improvement and student learning” (Hallinger, 2011, p. 127). Additionally, the model shown in Figure 1 (Chapter I, p. 12) underscores that leaders’ behaviors must take into account organizational and environmental context, the personal characteristics of leaders themselves, shows that leadership does not directly impact student learning but does indirectly impact student achievement (Hallinger, 2011; Hallinger, 2003; Robinson, et al., 2008). The term instructional leadership has primarily been used for principals’ practices, but leadership for learning includes a broader range of transformational leadership behaviors influencing school improvement and student achievement (Hallinger, 2011). The synthesized leadership for learning conceptual framework lays out commonly used dimensions of instructional leadership: values leadership, leadership focus, context for leadership, and sharing leadership. These dimensions are incorporated in Figure 1 and will be further investigated in the next portion of this chapter.

The synthesized model of leadership for learning emphasizes an open system where leadership is impacted by societal, institutional, community, and organizational factors. These factors are shown in the model outside the boxes and labelled societal culture, institutional system, staff and community characteristics, and school organization (Hallinger, 2011). The impact of these factors on leadership are included in the description of the four dimensions of instructional leadership.

**Values Leadership.** Values Leadership, the first dimension of instructional leadership, is incorporated in the model with two boxes on the left hand side labelled Beliefs, Values and Knowledge, Experience. The model shows these factors directly influencing leadership practices. Hallinger (2011) defined values as not only the ends/goals of a school but also the means by
which to achieve goals. Further, Hallinger (2011) stated that principals must first take the time to understand the culture of the school as well as the environmental culture coming from policymakers. Additionally, understanding a school’s culture and external forces such as standards-based curriculum change provides the background to take on problems with creative solutions to influence the improvement of the school culture (Hadjithoma-Garstka, 2011; Hess, 2013; Lawrenz, Huffman, & Lavoie, 2005; McCrimmon, 2004). Specifically, the values of leaders are revealed in day-to-day decisions concerning the allocation of resources, staffing, problem solving, motivation, and collaboration (Fullan 2011; Hallinger, 2011; Hess, 2013; Kouzes & Posner, 2002). Instructional leaders who utilize data to inform the day-to-day decisions, goals, and values are promoting professional and student learning (Hallinger, 2011; Knapp, Copeland, & Swinnerton, 2007). Further imparting the importance of school culture, Hess (2013) stated that “culture is the glue that bonds the community of teachers and learners” (p.25).

McCrimmon (2004) refers to Kouzes and Posner’s theory as values leadership “because asking people to undertake a risky journey with you depends on your credibility, as they rightly argue, which in turn depends on what you stand for as a person – your values. Moreover, the changes advocated by such leaders generally entail a shift in cultural or personal values” (p. 2). Kouzes and Posner’s (2002) research provides valuable insight into the beliefs and values that shape the practices of educational leaders and impact school culture on the journey that is educational reform. Kouzes and Posner’s (2002) Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership are model the way, inspire a shared vision, challenge the process, enable others to act, and encourage the heart. Model the way means direct personal involvement by leaders who have earned respect. Inspire a shared vision occurs when leaders envision changes, understand their followers and
communicate through dialogue their vision to obtain supporters. For challenge the process, leaders step out with action and provide a safe climate of risk-taking, innovation, and improvement. Leaders enable others act by promoting relationships of collaboration and trust across the organization. Finally, leaders encourage the heart of members in the organization through celebrating wins, encouraging others, and caring for them to obtain a sense of community. Combining these five transformational practices will result in exemplary leadership and reveal leaders’ values (Kouzes & Posner, 2002).

Values shape the behaviors of principals and provide the core of their practice as they become self-aware (Hallinger, 2011; Kouzes & Posner, 2002; McCrimmon, 2004; Quong & Walker, 2010). An aspect of self-awareness, empathy, is an important element for principal’s leadership (Hess, 2013). Noddings (2012) stated, time spent building relationships of care and trust is not wasted and promotes a climate of growth. Starratt (1991) asked an appropriate question, what do our relationships ask of us? Mayeroff’s (1995) answer: caring is a process to help others grow through devotion to another, merging of what one wants to do and what one is supposed to do, growing in responsibility for self, and knowing one’s self. Starratt (1991) stated that educators committed to the ethic of care hold the integrity of relationships sacred (p.195). Educational leaders develop relationships and provide care through a process of actualization with the components of knowing, alternating rhythms, honesty, trust, humility, hope, courage (Mayeroff, 1995). Beck (1994) called the activities of care receiving, responding, and remaining. Receiving is being open and willing to accept or step into another person’s reality. Responding occurs when one takes action on behalf of another. Remaining means to be committed and sacrifice for another. These components of care take time to develop and are only possible with a foundation of a positive relationship. According to Bricker (1993), Aristotle
proposed the importance of recognizing the prominent features of a situation in order to do well by applying the moral virtues needed in particular situations. In other words, Aristotle said that in order to be ethical, we must do ethical things. Ethical practice and self-awareness are important values for educational leaders to lead change, promote a positive school culture, and obtain the collaboration of teachers to take ownership in the change process (Hess, 2013; Lawrenz et al., 2005; Leithwood et al., 2006; Quong & Walker, 2010).

Values leadership is the thinking and actions of leaders and their own personal values to achieve a strong learning culture in a school (Hallinger, 2011; McCrimmon, 2004). Values leadership is reflected in the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (2015) number 2, “ethics and professional norms”. Ethics and professional norms are described as effective leaders acting ethically, with integrity, fairness, trust, valuing relationships and collaboration through interpersonal and communication skills, and providing moral direction for the school (NPBEA, 2015, p. 10). The beliefs, values, knowledge, and experience of leaders are personal characteristics directly impacting leadership focus.

Leadership Focus. Another dimension of the leadership for learning synthesized model is leadership focus found in the center box on the left hand side of the model labelled leadership. According to the model, leadership focus directly impacts vision and goals, academic structures and processes, and people capacity. Leadership focus is defined as the indirect ways leadership influences student outcomes and adjusts to changing conditions over time (Hallinger, 2011, p. 129). Successful school leadership integrates transformational, instructional, and shared leadership to meet the demands of the school (Hallinger, 2011). The role collaboration plays is a key element in effective schools and is infused in every part of instructional leaders’ practices (Fullan, 2011; Hallinger, 2011; Hallinger & Heck, 2010; Lawrenz et al., 2005; Qian &
Walker, 2013; Supovitz, Sirinides, & May, 2010; Waldron & McLeskey, 2010). Supovitz et al., (2010) stated “trust and collaboration point directly to the cultural heart of the school organization” (p. 35). Studies also reveal that a strong positive relationship exists between strong communication in schools and positive attitudes and behaviors of stakeholders to contribute to effective schools (Burns & Martin, 2010; Supovitz et al., 2010). Additionally, Burns and Martin (2010) stated that effective principals are people-oriented and recognize that people are the most influential resource in establishing an effective school. Collaboration is an important aspect of instructional leaders as they develop democratic processes to include teachers and other stakeholders in goal-setting, decision-making and implementation of those decisions and goals to build capacity (Hallinger, 2011; Leithwood et al., 2006; Mombourquette & Bedard, 2014; Waldron & McLeskey, 2010). Robinson et al., (2008) conducted a meta-analysis of leadership and concluded that the closer educational leaders promote the “core business of teaching and learning,” a primary element of instructional leadership, the greater likelihood of positive impact on student achievement (p. 664). Additionally, Robinson et al. (2008) concluded that transformational and instructional leadership overlap with vision and goals, but instructional leadership shows a much greater impact on student achievement than transformation leadership and other types of leadership.

Further, Robinson et al. (2008) found that transformational leadership focuses more on relationships between leader and followers and instructional leadership focuses more on the educational work of school leadership and captures leadership practices better.

Leadership focus on educational organization is a vital element of successful leadership in effective schools (Hallinger, 2003; Murphy, Elliott, Goldring, & Porter, 2007; Robinson et al., 2008). The three ways leadership indirectly impacts student outcomes are vision and goals,
academic structures and processes, and people capacity (Hallinger, 2011). These functions
directly relate to Hallinger and Murphy’s (1985) PIMRS Instructional Leadership model
discussed earlier (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; Hallinger & Wang, 2015). The first function
leadership focus directly impacts, vision and goals, is located in the center of the model. Vision
and goals provide the greatest impact on student outcomes when they are learning focused
(2008) concurred that vision and goals were educationally significant, but listed these means as
secondary in impact on student outcomes. However, stressing the importance of goals, Robinson
et al. (2008) stated that goals are vital especially when they are aligned with intended student
outcomes and when they enable teachers to use data for feedback to analyze their instruction.
Additionally, schools become more effective and accountability among instructional leaders and
teachers rises to achieve the collective beliefs, values, and goals of the organization (Elmore,
2005; Quong & Walker, 2010; Robinson et al., 2008).

The second function principals directly impact is through academic structures and
processes. This function is located in the center of the model. A primary influencer of this
function is the context or culture of the school for building the school’s capacity for academic
improvement (Hallinger, 2011). Collaborative leadership and academic improvement worked
mutually to build academic capacity and improve learning outcomes (Hallinger, 2011; Hallinger
& Heck, 2010; Leithwood et al., 2006). Principals can facilitate changes to impact internal
school processes including school policies, academic expectations, mission, academic learning
time, instructional organization, individualized support for teachers and students, and monitoring
student progress (Hallinger & Heck, 1996, 2010). Further, these school processes are the primary
indirect affects principals have on student achievement (Hallinger, 2011; Hallinger & Heck,
Ensuring an orderly and supportive climate provides a situation where teacher and student learning can take place (Robinson et al., 2008). This pathway of principals’ impact on student outcomes is reflected in the PIMRS framework: coordinating curriculum, monitoring student progress, protects instructional time, provides incentives for teachers and students.

The third function principals directly impact, people capacity, is located in the center of the model. Robinson et al. (2008) in their meta-analysis stated, “The leadership dimension that is most strongly associated with positive student outcomes is that of promoting and participating in teacher learning and development” (p. 667). A concurring view, Leithwood et al. (2006) stated that a key to influencing student achievement is educational leadership improving teacher performance. Instructional leaders are vigorous supporters of formal and informal professional development for teachers and are viewed as sources of knowledge and resources (Murphy et al., 2007; Robinson et al., 2008). Expectations and organization systems are established by the instructional leader to promote continual learning of best practices focused on student achievement (Murphy et al., 2007). Additionally, instructional leaders model professional learning and best practices to promote accountability to achieve school goals through problem framing and solving, decision-making, conflict resolution, group processes and consensus building, and communication (Murphy et al., 2007, p. 189). Research has found that instructional leaders who embedded instructional improvement cultivated a community of instructional practice for teachers who were engaged in and deepened their work providing improved instructional practices (Ham & Kim, 2013; Killion & Hirsh; 2013; Mombourquette & Bedard, 2014; Supovitz et al., 2010; Wayman & Jimerson, 2014). Specifically, Grissom, Loeb, and Master (2013) found that walkthroughs by principals were effective only when teachers viewed the practice as part of professional development. Further, instructional leaders that facilitated
professional discourse among faculty and staff during the day also improved greatly the efficiency, critical thinking, and student learning (Eilers & D’Amico, 2012; Mombourquette & Bedard, 2014; Murray, 2014).

Qian and Walker (2013), in their study of principals during curriculum change in China, discovered that effective instructional leaders tailored professional development activities for teachers based on strategic data resources. The nature of education reform places a high value on student achievement for accountability purposes causing administrators to focus primarily on student achievement data (Shen, Cooley, Reeves, Burt, Ryan, Rainey, & Yuan, 2010). Wayman and Stringfield (2006) have argued that a common understanding of the role of data is critical if it is to be used to improve schools and student achievement. Murray (2014) stated, “Until school leaders use student achievement data as one data source among many, and not the only data source, the data-informed decision-making movement will have little effect on improving schools and student learning” (p. 4). Using multiple sources of data such as student achievement data, demographic data, perception data, and school process data will enhance professional learning and decision-making (Bernhardt, 2004; Coburn & Talbert, 2006; Murray, 2014). Principals who established structured time, worked directly with specific teachers and help them focus on specific measurable goals using data, provided improved student instruction (Wayman & Stringfield, 2006; Wayman & Jimerson, 2014). Additionally, instructional leaders who promote the use of and provide professional development to teach the effective use of data is essential to achieve the vision of implementing the CCSS (Blau & Presser; 2013; Killion & Hirsh, 2013; Schildkamp & Kuiper, 2010)

**Context for Leadership.** A third dimension of the leadership for learning synthesized model is the context for leadership. This dimension is incorporated into the model through the
situational and contingency elements of leadership and informs the role of leadership and the school context (Hallinger, 2011). According to Hersey, Blanchard and Johnson (2001) situational leadership is based on the interaction of the leader’s direction and guidance, the amount of emotional support the leader provides, and the readiness level of the followers. Therefore, there is no one best way to influence followers and there is no one leadership style that a leader will use as the leader assesses the context and followers’ ability and willingness to accomplish a task (Hersey, Blanchard, & Johnson, 2001). Day, Sammons, Hopkins, Harris, Leithwood, Gu, Grown, Ahtaridou, & Kingston (2010) identified four stages of school improvement and approaches to leadership for learning: the turnaround phase, taking ownership, developing creativity, everyone a leader. Rather than working on one area of effective leadership, leaders can work towards developing different leadership strategies depending on the contextual needs of the school (Day et al., 2010; Hersey, Blanchard, & Johnson, 2001). Fullan’s (2011) discussion of the change process is also useful in this context of situational leadership, stating that leaders must adapt to changing circumstances and leadership development must be flexible in leadership style and strategies. Similarly, Hersey et al., (2001) stated that leader effectiveness was dependent on the context and the situation in which the leader worked to determine the response and behaviors of the leader in particular situations. Hallinger (2011) summarily stated that principals must adapt their leadership styles and strategies to fit the context of changing circumstances in their schools.

**Sharing Leadership.** The fourth dimension of the leadership for learning synthesized model, sharing leadership, is incorporated in the model through distributed practices identified in the model with double arrows. Distributed leadership theory is helpful in the discussion of sharing leadership and collaboration as an important element of instructional leadership.
Spillane, Halverson, and Diamond (2001) stated the central objective of distributed leadership is to understand the links between external forces and internal school culture with school leadership and exploring instruction and instructional changes that must occur in an effective school. Additionally, a distributed perspective on leadership involves not only the principal, but also assistant principals, teacher leaders, curriculum specialists, and other school leaders (Hallinger & Heck, 2010; Leithwood et al., 2006). Instructional leaders who focused on building a school environment of mutual trust and respect received more support from teachers regarding curriculum change and instruction (Hallinger, 2003; Leithwood et al., 2006; Robinson et al., 2008; Spillane and Hunt, 2010). Additionally, Spillane and Hunt (2010), in their study of United States principals, pointed that principals were not acting in the lone-ranger image, rather they frequently worked with teachers or were sitting in on activities in which they were not leading. Further, Horng and Loeb (2010) reported that leaders who worked directly with teachers and were often present in classrooms, provided strong leadership, and engaged in curriculum and instruction changes.

Elmore’s (2005) accountability research pointed to administrators’ tendency to blame their behaviors on external forces. By working collectively, administrators and teachers can use their beliefs and skills to respond to external forces such as standards-based curriculum to shape the vision and goals for the future, influence positive change in their school, and hold themselves collectively accountable (Elmore, 2005). Collaboration on goals inspire people to contribute their efforts to achieving the collective goal (Fullan, 2011; Kouzes & Posner, 2002; Quong & Walker, 2010). Additionally, the collective establishment of goals improved the performance of staff by narrowing the scope of their activities and provided the basis for making staffing decisions, resource allocation, and program adoption by educational leaders (Hallinger, 2011; Waldron &
McLeskey, 2010). In their study on collaborative culture in schools, Waldron and McLeskey (2010) found that a principal in a school with a collaborative culture works hard to ensure that all members of the school are focused on the collective vision and goals of the school. Supporting the collaboration concept, additional studies show that change initiated solely by administration resulted in failure as teachers resisted the change (Lawrenz et al., 2005). Studies show that even low SES schools with clear vision and goals embedded into their school culture were effective in their improvement (Hallinger, 2011; Hallinger & Heck, 2010). Collaborative leadership used by instructional leaders in schools positively changed the capacity of academic improvement of students through teacher training (Hallinger 2011; Hallinger & Heck, 2010, 2010; Wayman & Jimerson, 2014). These findings provided empirical support for the premise that schools can improve learning regardless of their initial achievement levels by utilizing distributed leadership and collaboration to highlight the crucial role instructional leaders played in sustaining focus in an effective school. As of the writing of this chapter, no known published articles have utilized this model. The investigation of the dimensions of instructional leadership prompts examination of the current expectations placed on principals.

**Summary**

A history of education reform in secondary schools beginning with standard curriculum in the 19th century, followed by twentieth and twenty-first century’s reforms has been examined. A review of professional standards for school leaders was conducted. Additionally, an investigation of the background and dimensions of instructional leadership have also been included in this study. Further investigation is required to determine principal’s perceptions of their role concerning the implementation of standards based reform like the Common Core State
Standards. Additionally, principals’ perceptions were used to determine how their behaviors impact decision making in their school environment.
CHAPTER III. METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate principals’ perceived roles and strategies to implement educational reform. This study investigated principals’ perceived roles and strategies used to promote values and school culture, collaboration, professional development, risk taking, and feedback as they implement current educational reforms. Hallinger’s (2011) Leadership for Learning Model is the theoretical framework through which data were analyzed. This model suggests that instructional leadership strategies utilized by principals empower teachers, build people’s capacity, establish the academic setting, and promote visions and goals for academic success. These strategies provide the organizational context to indirectly promote student achievement, the focus of educational reform. This model was selected because implicit in the framework is the “desire to understand how school principals, and other leaders, shape conditions in the school that directly impact learning outcomes for students” (Hallinger & Wang, 2015, p. 38). The purpose of this study fits the model because the study and the model both seek to understand principals’ behaviors used to implement educational reform. The Leadership for Learning Model provided insight into these principal characteristics because it synthesizes instructional leadership factors including values leadership, leadership focus, context for leadership, and sharing leadership. Additionally, the model includes a broad range of transformational leadership behaviors specifically impacting school improvement and student achievement.

This chapter will begin with a brief description of qualitative research and the reason a phenomenological approach was appropriate. I examined the characteristics of phenomenology and the role of the researcher. Then, I explain the context of the study and how I selected participants for the study. Next, the methods section includes interview procedures,
instrumentation, data collection, and data analysis. Finally, I include issues related to ensuring validity.

**Research Questions**

In order to capture the principals’ experiences as leaders in their buildings in this time of educational reform, the following research questions were addressed:

1) What do principals from secondary schools in northwest Ohio perceive to be their role as instructional leaders concerning the implementation of Ohio’s Learning Standards?

2) What leadership strategies do principals utilize to carry out implementation of Ohio’s Learning Standards and assessments in their school environment?

**Phenomenology**

Qualitative research falls into five broad categories: narratives, case studies, grounded theory, ethnography, and phenomenology. Generally, qualitative research is focused on understanding and interpreting how participants in a social context view their world (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Qualitative studies are often focused on in-depth, long-term interactions with participants in the social context (Glesne, 2010). Qualitative researchers attempt to approach the data with an open mindset while they look for patterns in the participants’ story to understand the social phenomena being studied (Glesne, 2010). Researchers gain insight into many participants’ perspectives of the social context to interpret the data. Denzin and Lincoln (2011) stated that the types of empirical data obtained in a qualitative study are varied and numerous including “field notes, interviews, conversations, introspection, photographs, recordings, memos, . . . case studies, personal experience, observational, historical, cultural, interactional and visual texts, artifacts, and life story” (p. 3-4). All of these sources of data help describe an individuals’
experience in a social context. One type of qualitative research utilizing the data sources and discovering individuals’ experiences in phenomenology.

Husserl (1931), a primary founder of phenomenology later to be termed transcendental phenomenology, believed in studying the lived world through the experiences of people (as cited in Kafle, 2011). In a phenomenological study, three to ten people who experienced the same phenomenon are studied to determine their lived experience (Creswell, 2014). Phenomenology is the most appropriate qualitative method to use in this study because phenomenological study is concerned with identifying the lived world that is perceived by persons experiencing the same situation (Lester, 1999). Additionally, Lester (1999) stated “phenomenological methods are particularly effective at bringing to the fore the experiences and perceptions of individuals from their own perspectives” (p.1). Further, phenomenology is concerned with understanding the psychological and social complexity of a social context from the perspectives of those involved in the same situation (Welman & Kruger, 1999). Understanding the perspectives of those experiencing the same phenomenon will aid in understanding the meaning of the phenomenon.

The situation of the participants in this study is being a principal of a rural school in Northwest Ohio implementing Ohio’s educational reforms.

More specifically, a type of phenomenology called transcendental phenomenology, was used in this study. Kafle (2011) describes transcendental phenomenological study as learning about and explaining the lived world. Additionally, it is discovering the lived experiences of those involved with the issue being researched by removing bias and following a step by step procedure of reduction (Groenewald, 2004). Further, participant’s personal perspectives are powerful for gaining insight into motivations and behavior (Lester, 1999). I chose transcendental phenomenology to discover and describe the common experience of six principals leading their
buildings through educational reforms. “The fact that this approach [transcendental phenomenology] relies on individual experiences means that the stories to be told will be told from the participants’ voices and not those of the researcher” (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004, p. 23). Data on principals’ experiences were obtained through interviews, observations, and artifacts in a phenomenological study because the participants have lived the experience of implementing educational reform and rich detail may be gleaned from their story (England, 2012). Moustakas (1994), a primary advocate of transcendental phenomenology, believed two essential questions must be asked of participants. They are: What have you experienced? And what are the contexts and situations of the experience? (as cited in Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004). From these two starter open ended questions, Moustakas (1994) presented a step by step process to follow in data collection and analysis that will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter. Further, the transcendental phenomenological approach utilizing systematic procedures outlined by Moustakas is “ideal for assisting less experienced researchers … and balances both the objective and subjective approaches to knowledge and detailed, rigorous data analysis steps” (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004, p. 5). Further evidence for the use of transcendental phenomenology for my study of principals’ role perception and strategies they use to implement educational reform are other studies regarding similar circumstances.

One example is Moerer-Urdahl and Creswell’s (2004) use of transcendental phenomenology to study mentors in a college mentoring program. This study investigated the ripple effect defined as the initial human investment made in helping mentees, but also the long-term, multiplying investment the mentees made on others. Especially, in the age of educational reform where principals must be more transformational in their leadership, principals are mentors to teachers and students making a difference in their lives and ostensibly causing a
ripple effect from school. Another example is Raffanti’s (2008) study of teacher leaders. This study provided evidence for transcendental phenomenology to be used with leaders in an educational setting. The study explored the common phenomenon of peer leaders in professional development, technology, department chair, and mentoring. Principals are not peer leaders. However, principals do lead in professional development, leading the school building, and mentorship. This educational setting and the investigation of school leaders’ strategies lends evidence of a successful study utilizing transcendental phenomenology.

My phenomenological study incorporated the interpretivist paradigm because interpretivism seeks to discover what is going on with individuals in a social or historical context (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999, p. 59). In interpretivism, the researcher is informed and involved with the participants through the interview process. The researcher focuses on meanings from observed behaviors, subjective understanding, and explaining variance and bias. Additionally, participants are involved in the process through defining and describing their situation and member checking. Ultimately, the goal of interpretivism is to achieve understanding of behavior by studying a phenomenon in a specific setting (Le Compte & Schensul, 1999). My study fits into this paradigm because as a twenty-two year veteran of teaching school, I am informed of the current education situation regarding standardized curriculum and assessments. My study involved collecting data through multiple means to discover principals’ role perception and use of strategies in the process of implementing educational reforms.

Utilizing the interpretivist paradigm in this transcendental phenomenological study to discover the common experience of principals implementing educational reform included an important aspect to transcendental phenomenology called epoché. Also termed bracketing, this concept includes the process of the examiner discerning personal experiences with the
phenomenon and then attempting to set aside the personal experiences in order to perceive the phenomenon from the participants’ perspective (Creswell, 2014). Bevan (2014) stated that it is important to acknowledge the impossibility for a researcher to completely abstain from personal knowledge of a situation. The point is for the researcher to become aware of his or her “natural attitude” about the subject being studied and adopt a critical position (Bevan, 2014).

Additionally, Peshkin (1988) noted the importance of being aware of and monitoring the investigator’s subjectivity during the process of data collection and analysis. I do not believe it was possible to entirely set aside personal experiences. However, this process provided a platform for me to be aware of my predispositions and critically assess the phenomenon.

**Researcher Subjectivity**

As a teacher completing twenty-two years in the high school social studies classroom, I have experienced many education reforms. Dramatic changes in the school ensued with the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in 2001 commonly called No Child Left Behind (2002). New curriculum and standardized assessments were mandated to meet accountability requirements. This caused a major shift in curriculum mapping and classroom instruction to meet the curricula standards and prepare students for high stakes assessments. Curriculum mapping is making sure the content to be taught at certain grade levels and subject areas matches the content standards in the curriculum. After the shock of what teachers were now required to accomplish wore off, frustration was intermingled with an attitude of get the job done.

Ohio accepted Race to the Top (RttT) money, a federal education grant in 2009 providing funds for eligible states to assist in carrying out No Child Left Behind (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). Ohio had to realign curriculum to new standards called Ohio’s Learning
Standards (2010) with new assessments called Next Generation Assessments to determine accountability. Teachers had to complete curriculum mapping once again to meet the new standards and prepare students for new high stakes assessments. Additional educational reform from accepting Race to the Top money included accountability for teachers and administrators by applying student test scores and evaluations. In 2015, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) was passed replacing No Child Left Behind and ushered all states into developing a plan to align all schools to this federal law with state plans submitted by September, 2017 (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). Frustration set in when political powers keep changing the expectations of teachers and students. However, my decision to teach the new standards and prepare my students for the new assessments reemerged with a get the job done attitude. Getting the job done entailed adjusting my classroom instruction to include more detailed instruction of content surrounding the progressive era, more practice for students to prepare specifically for the new assessments, and additional preparations for teacher evaluations. My feelings or subjectivity about politicians moving the target that we were supposed to hit and principals behaviors to implement reforms to hit the targets, needed to be recognized, reflected upon, and written down before I interviewed any principals. Additionally, I had to be aware of and document my biases before and during the process of data collection and analysis (Bevan, 2014; Peshkin, 1982; Wolcott, 1995).

This brief background of my experience and frustration with education reform led to my study. Teachers are on the front lines of student instruction, but principals have led the implementation process of these education reforms in their buildings. I have always wondered how principals have perceived their role and how they determined the strategies they utilized to
accomplish implementation. Therefore, this study is directed at discovering the role perception and strategies principals used to aid teachers to accomplish their tasks.

The frustration I have felt during the ever-changing educational reforms impacts my perceptions of the educational reforms and influences what I expect to hear from principals I interview. I anticipate hearing principals express frustration regarding specific reforms including evaluations. Specifically, the amount of time it takes from the school year to carry them out and the use of student growth as a major component of the evaluations for teachers and principals. I must guard against sharing my frustration and report their experience. I must be sure to report the experiences of the principals and not interject my bias into their phenomenon. By writing down my bias, I am more aware of my bias. Therefore, when I ask principals to tell me about their role perceptions and strategies, I am more open to hear to their story and probe for more details of their experience. The procedures for selecting participants, data collection, and analysis will be explained in the next section of this chapter.

Methods

This section will describe participant selection and criteria. Protocol for the interviews to be conducted is also explained. This section will also include data collection and analysis.

Participants

A requirement of phenomenological research requires that all participants in a study experience the same phenomenon. I utilized purposeful sampling because with this sampling strategy, Maxwell (2013) stated that particular persons are selected intentionally to provide data that is specifically relevant to the research questions and goals that cannot be obtained as well from other sources (p. 97). Purposeful sampling worked in my study because I was seeking information from principals about their role perception and strategies they use to implement
educational reforms in Ohio. The participants of this study were six principals from Typology 1 or Typology 2 secondary schools in Northwest Ohio with at least seven years of experience. The sample size of six fits into what Duke (1984) stated as the appropriate range of three to ten participants for a phenomenological study (as cited in Creswell, 2013, p. 157). Additionally, the purpose for using multiple participants is to provide accounts of the same experience from different perspectives (Polkinghorne, 2005). In 2013, Ohio revised the school district typologies; designating Typology 1 schools as rural, high student poverty and small student population and Typology 2 schools as rural, average student poverty and very small student population. The common experience of the principals was that they worked in Typology 1 or Typology 2 high schools in Northwest Ohio, they had at least seven years of experience as a principal, and they were building leaders charged with implementing educational reforms presented by the Ohio Department of Education as part of their implementation of ESSA.

An importance of studying rural schools is the absence of literature in educational reform in rural settings (Barrett, Cowen, Toma, & Troske, 2015). Nearly all of the literature on educational reform focused on the difference between suburban and urban schools. Additionally, rural schools struggle with limited options to respond to accountability measures to improve student outcomes (Barrett et al., 2015). Further, Barret et al. (2015) pointed out the acute problem rural schools face in developing teachers’ skills. Rural schools find themselves administratively disadvantaged so they join membership in educational consortia (known as Education Service Centers) who find it difficult to serve multiple school districts with often conflicting needs (Yettick, Baker, Wickersham, & Hupfeld, 2014). At the time of this study, there are thirty-four school districts in the Typology 1 and Typology 2 designation in Northwest Ohio.
To acquire participants, I emailed superintendents of the Typology 1 and Typology 2 school districts in Northwest Ohio to obtain permission to recruit their high school principal for my study. Thirteen superintendents granted written permission for me to recruit their high school principal. After acquiring approval from the Bowling Green State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) to conduct my study, I emailed recruitment letters to the thirteen high school principals whose superintendents gave me permission to recruit. In the recruitment letter, I stated the purpose of my study, the role the principal would play in the study and that their participation was voluntary. Included in the letter, was the statement that the principals must be responsible for implementation of the educational reforms in their building. It was necessary that I interview principals that actually implemented the educational reforms to answer my research questions. I made follow up phone calls to the thirteen principals to ascertain their interest in participating in my study. Upon obtaining the approval of six principals, an interview date, location of their choosing, and time was determined. I wanted the principals to choose their meeting location so that they would be in a comfortable setting. An email was then sent to the six principals with the Informed Consent for Principals document for them to peruse before the interview. The Informed Consent for Principals document can be found as Appendix A. This would give the principals the opportunity to ask any questions of me, my advisor, or IRB before the interviews began. In the email, I also confirmed the interview date, location, and time. A request for documents including policies, meeting agendas, and memos was included for me to pick up at the first interview. The interview procedure will be discussed in more detail in the data collection section. The rationale for selecting high school principals for this study applies to the nature of my research questions; to discover principals’ perceptions and decision making to
implement modern education reforms. An overview of the principals in my study is contained in
the next section.

**Participant Overviews**

This section will include a brief description of each principal including distinguishing
factors of the district and the building they work in. Each principal has been provided a
 pseudonym. Descriptive data include the principals’ years of experience and brief background.
 School district data include the district’s typology, median income, and student poverty rate.
 Building data include the type of building, student body size, and achievement scores.

Recording the achievement scores of each principal’s building is appropriate because a
factor for principals’ role perceptions and strategies concerns state standards and testing. A
transition year for achievement scores in Ohio occurred in the 2014-2015 school year. This was
the final year for the Ohio Graduation Test and the first year for the Partnership for Assessment
of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) consortium’s exams for English Language Arts
and Mathematics (Churchill, 2015). Additionally, the American Institutes for Research (AIR)
developed state tests for science and social studies for the 2014-2015 school year (Ohio
Department of Education, 2016). Therefore, school districts received two scores on their report
 card for the 2014-2015 school year. The current Ohio Report Card Achievement Score for high
school buildings began in the 2015-2016 school year with all state tests developed by AIR
(O’Donnell, 2013). Therefore, the achievement scores from the 2014-2015, 2015-2016, and
2016-2017 school years were included in the overview. The Ohio Report Card Achievement
Score combines the Performance Index with the number of Indicators met for the state tests. The
district and building data for median income, percent of student poverty, student body size, and
achievement scores were obtained from the Ohio Department of Education website (2017). The
goal of including the district and building data is to aid the reader in differentiating between the
districts and buildings of the principals and to present a snapshot of circumstances the principals
encounter as they lead their buildings through educational reforms in Ohio.

**Jen.** Jen (pseudonym) has seven years of experience as a grade 7-12 principal, all in her
current district. Overall, she has been in education for ten years. The school district is Typology
1 with a median income of $25,646 and a student poverty rate of 55%. She is responsible for a
grade 7-12 building with a student population of 433. The 2015-16 State Report Card
Achievement Score for her building was a D. The 2016-17 State Report Card Achievement
Score for her building was a D.

**Ann.** Ann has seventeen years of experience as a principal, but in her forty-fourth year in
education. Ann had retired after 20 years as a high school principal and was in her first year in
her current school at the time of the study. Additionally, she has held other administrative
positions for seven years. The school district is Typology 1 with a median income of $30,227
and a student poverty rate of 45%. She is responsible for a grade 7-12 building with a student
population of 231. The 2015-16 State Report Card Achievement Score for her building was a D.
The 2016-17 State Report Card Achievement Score for her building was a D.

**Brad.** Brad has twenty-nine years of experience as a principal, but in his thirty-seventh
year in education. Brad had retired after 26 years as a high school principal and was in his third
year in his current school at the time of the study. The school district is Typology 1 with a
median income of $31,231 and a student poverty rate of 42%. He is responsible for a grade 7-12
building with a student population of 398. The 2015-16 State Report Card Achievement Score
for his building was a D. The 2016-17 State Report Card Achievement Score for his building
was a C.
Lee. Lee has thirteen years of experience as a principal with a total of twenty-two years in education. He has been a principal at an urban school and a rural school. His current school district is Typology 2 with a median income of $34,093 and a student poverty rate of 32%. He is responsible for a grade 9-12 building with a student population of 318. The 2015-16 State Report Card Achievement Score for his building was a D. The 2016-17 State Report Card Achievement Score for his building was a D.

Rick. Rick has 15 years of experience as a principal, with thirty-nine years in education. Rick served as a teacher and an administrator in an urban school, then became a principal at two rural schools. His current school district is Typology 2 with a median income of $36,023 and a student poverty rate of 34%. He is responsible for a grade 9-12 building with a student population of 338. The 2015-16 State Report Card Achievement Score for his building was a D. The 2016-17 State Report Card Achievement Score for his building was a D.

Jack. Jack has 10 years of experience as a principal all in rural school districts with a total of nineteen years in education. He had a particularly interesting situation because he fulfills two jobs at the same time, high school principal and district superintendent. I was especially interested in interviewing him because he has this unique perspective. The school district is Typology 2 with a median income of $39,107 and a student poverty rate of 10%. He is responsible for a grade 9-12 building with a student population of 318. The 2015-16 State Report Card Achievement Score for his building was a B. The 2016-17 State Report Card Achievement Score for his building was a B.

The principals in this study are veteran principals with differing backgrounds, but currently serve in similar schools. Data in Table 1 include years of administrative experience, typology of their current school as determined by the Ohio Department of Education (ODE),
median income as determined by ODE, student poverty rate as determined by ODE, the grades in
the building each principal leads, the number of students in their building, and the student
achievement scores for the last three school years. These years are appropriate because they are
the three years in which new state assessments were recorded. The table below presents the
comparisons of each principal and their building situation. Data sources and data collection
protocols will be described after Table 1 in the next sections of this chapter.
Table 1
Overview of Principals’ Situations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principal Name (pseudonyms)</th>
<th>Years of Administrative Experience</th>
<th>Typology</th>
<th>Median Income</th>
<th>Student Poverty</th>
<th>Grades in Building</th>
<th>Number of Students</th>
<th>2014-15 State Report Card Achievement Grade *</th>
<th>2015-16 State Report Card Achievement Grade</th>
<th>2016-17 State Report Card Achievement Grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jen</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>$25,646</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>7-12</td>
<td>433</td>
<td>C / B</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ann</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>$30,227</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>7-12</td>
<td>238</td>
<td>C / B</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brad</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>$31,231</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>7-12</td>
<td>398</td>
<td>C / A</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lee</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>$34,093</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>9-12</td>
<td>318</td>
<td>C / D</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rick</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>$36,023</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>9-12</td>
<td>338</td>
<td>B / A</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jack</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>$39,107</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>9-12</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>B / A</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: 2014-2015 was the final year for the Ohio Graduation Test and first year for the PARCC and AIR state tests. The Ohio Department of Education did not combine the Performance Index Score and Indicators Met Score during this transition year. The first score listed is the Performance Index. The second score reflects the Indicators Met. 2015-2016 was the first year the AIR tests were recorded as a summation score of the Performance Index and Indicators Met.
Data Sources

Data collection included obtaining information through three sources: interviews, observations, and artifacts to provide a triangulation of sources. The first data source, one-on-one interviews, consisted of two rounds of interviews of the participants. Questions for the first interview consisted of eight semi-structured questions based on the review of literature contained in Chapter Two. Eight questions are used because that is close to Creswell’s (2013) suggestion that four to seven questions are appropriate for interviews. The questions were written to discover role expectations of principals and the strategies principals use to implement educational reform. More specifically, the semi-structured questions addressed sub-questions of the research questions in a manner that the participants can understand (Creswell, 2013). Sub-questions provide direction for principals to answer more specific content areas of the research questions to obtain in-depth information about their experience in implementing educational reform.

Before conducting the actual interviews, I administered two pilot tests with principals from the same typology as the principals who participated in my study (Glesne, 1999). Pilot testing was a method to refine interview questions and procedures (Creswell, 2013; Maxwell, 2013). I utilized the pilot test to determine if the interview procedure, recording devices, number of questions, and wording of questions are appropriate. Additionally, the pilot interviews helped determine the suitable length of time needed for the actual interviews. The time worked out to be forty to forty-five minutes. I conducted two pilot tests and not one, to obtain a comparison and determine commonality or discrepancy of information I gleaned regarding the interview procedure, recording, questions, and length of time.

Using information from the pilot interviews, I conducted the first round of interviews with the six high school principals that agreed to participate in my study. After the first round of
interviews were coded, the second round interview questions were developed. The follow-up questions for the second interview were generated from themes that emerged from coding to seek more clarification from statements the principals made in the first interview. The analysis procedure for coding and theme development will be described in the data analysis section. After the first and second round of interviews, I offered a member check to provide the principals a copy of what I heard them say and afforded them the opportunity to change or add any information.

The second data source, observations, occurred before the second interview. I conducted non-participant observations because they are key tools for collecting data in qualitative research and to record data without direct participation with the activity of the people (Creswell, 2013). I conducted non-participant observations to be removed from the activity in the building so I could better record what I saw and not be distracted by participating. Areas observed included the “physical setting, participants, activities, interactions, and conversations” (Creswell, 2013, p. 166). I began my observation by looking at the building from a broad perspective searching for general themes and context of the building. Then I focused on activities and objects that specifically pertained to the perceived role of the principals and strategies used by the principals to implement educational reforms in the building. A more detailed description of my observation procedure will be described in the data collection section.

To complete a triangulation of data, artifacts were collected. First, I looked for artifacts related to the general context of the building including posters, signs, or pictures that were prominent in the building. Taking photos of these artifacts to analyze later helped document the overall focus in the building. Then, I observed and collected data related specifically to the perception of the principal’s role and strategies principals use to implement educational reform.
Examples of data specific to my research questions included taking photos of signage in classrooms and teacher work areas. Additionally, I collected artifacts including demographic and statistical data, office memos, website pages, and meeting agendas. These are appropriate artifact data sources (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2011). In the next section, I will discuss how these data sources were collected.

Data Collection

To collect data, I conducted two rounds of interviews, observed the principals’ buildings, and collected artifacts. Data collection occurred using multiple methods to obtain a more complete context of the phenomenon from different perspectives (Maxwell, 2013). The procedures for data collection will be described below. The interview protocol and questions can be found as Appendix B.

First Interview. I conducted semi-structured, one-on-one interviews from October, 2017-November, 2017. Five of the six principals chose to hold the interviews in their own building. One chose to meet at an off-site location. Prior to the interviews, I perused the schools’ website to gain insight and obtain demographic data about the school district and the principals’ buildings. I also examined the Ohio Department of Education website to obtain data related to the schools including demographics, economic data, and report card scores before the interviews. Prior to beginning each interview, I provided a hard copy of the consent document and reviewed it. I confirmed that the information they provided would be anonymous and that I would be using pseudonyms to protect their identity as much as possible. Additionally, I noted that their participation was voluntary and they could pull out of the process at any time. Further, I stated that the interviews would be recorded using two audio recording devices in event one recording device failed and that the recordings were stored digitally and password protected. I also
communicated that the interview would last a maximum of forty-five minutes to value their time. Finally, I asked the principals if they had any questions. After the principals signed the consent document, I conducted the interview asking semi-structured questions to promote a conversational quality to the interview. Asking semi-structured questions provides participants the opportunity to more fully answer questions in their context to tell their story (Bevan, 2014). The first interview questions were structured to establish rapport, generally acquire a sense of their basic philosophy of leadership, and were directly tied to my research questions. Rapport is an essential part of the relationship between researcher and participant throughout the entire process of the study to obtain valid data (Erickson, 1985; Wolcott, 1995). I asked the participants the same questions for consistency and not skew one principal’s story from the others. At the conclusion of the interview, I was unable to obtain most of the documents that I had requested. However, the principals assured me that they would have documents available at the second interview. Also at the end of the interview, I was unable to schedule the second interview date, location, and time with the principals due to the uncertainty of schedules. However, the principals did agree to set up a second interview via email or phone. The digital recordings were transcribed as soon as possible after each interview to provide a readable copy for coding, analysis, and member checking.

**Observations.** After all of the first round interviews were completed, transcribed and coded, I contacted the six principals through email and phone calls to set up an observation and second interview. The second interview was scheduled to follow the observation in the building on the same day. The second interview procedure will be discussed in the next section. My observation began by noting the broad scope of the buildings. I documented items that held prominence in the building: pictures of the basketball team, trophies displayed, club activities, or
signs promoting school wide educational goals. The items promoted visually by the school provided insight into what was being promoted in the building or in certain portions of the building. I took photos of the items displayed to analyze at a later time. After recording the broad scope of the building, then I focused on noting the elements of the building that revealed role perception and strategies the principal utilized to implement educational reforms in the building. I proceeded to observe work spaces, offices, and classrooms when class was not being conducted to not disrupt classroom instruction. Taking photos and noting the elements on the walls in classrooms, offices, and work spaces as well as behaviors of staff and students. Watching and recording the behaviors and activities of the individuals in their school context was beneficial to corroborate or dispel the data gleaned from the first interview (Creswell, 2014). I used Creswell’s (2013) two-column descriptive and reflective field notes to help me discern elements of implementing state standards and assessments. The two-column format of field notes were organized with one side of the paper set aside for observed behaviors and the other side reserved for reflective notes. The descriptive notes column provided space to record and summarize observed activities (Creswell, 2013). The reflective side provided space to note my reflections on activities and conclusions that helped in theme development during data analysis (Creswell, 2013). This format provided the organization for me to note behaviors, activities, personal thoughts, and impressions to determine things that were happening and if I need to refocus on an activity that may be happening. Wolcott (1995) stressed the importance of continually reviewing what is being looked for and whether the observer is seeing those activities. I was unable to observe classroom instruction or staff meetings. Therefore, observing interaction between the people in the building was limited. After observing the building, noting
the big themes of the building and the specific role perception and strategies, the second
interview was conducted.

**Second Interview.** The second semi-structured interview was scheduled with the
principals through emails and phone calls. At that time, I confirmed that they would provide
documents requested earlier. All six of the principals chose their office for the location of the
second interview. The procedure for the second interview followed the same process as the first
interview. The second interview and questions can be found as Appendix C. I again reviewed the
hard copy of the consent document that the principals had signed previously noting anonymity
with pseudonyms, participation was voluntary, they could opt out of the study at any time, the
interview would last a maximum of forty-five minutes, and asked for any questions. I also
provided each principal the opportunity to member check the transcripts from the first interview.
Each of the principals presented documents I had requested after the review and before the
second interview began. Benner (1994) stressed the importance of more than one interview per
participant to more fully gain insight through asking clarifying questions in a subsequent
interview. I asked semi-structured questions in the second interview seeking clarification and
more depth concerning themes derived through the coding process from the first interview. The
procedure for collecting the third data source, artifacts will be described next.

**Artifacts.** I perused the schools’ websites prior to the interviews to gain insight into the
school district and the building I visited to aid in obtaining demographic data, rapport building,
and writing interview questions. I collected data from the Ohio Department of Education website
to obtain demographic, economic, and state report card data before visiting the school buildings.
Yin (2011) stated the importance of reviewing documents before interviews if possible to
provide insight into the organization. Data including demographics and prominent themes and
slogans that were available on the school and building website were helpful to gain insight into the school district and the building I visited. Additionally, I collected artifacts at the time I was in the building after the first and second interviews. For example, I took photos of hallway and office displays, posters and signs on hallway and classroom walls, and other posted materials to review during data analysis. Further, at the time of the interviews, I asked the principals for documents including those related to communication with staff regarding strategic planning, policies, memos, teacher meeting agendas, and professional development information. These artifacts provided insight into and examples of principals’ role perception and strategies for educational reform implementation used in the building. Documents provided by the participants proved helpful when I analyzed them in conjunction with data collected from interviews and observations (Maxwell, 2013). The procedures for data analysis will be explained in the next section.

Data Analysis

Data collection culminated in data analysis to construct rich descriptions that conveyed the experiences of the participants and my conclusions. The data analysis procedure will follow a simple version of Moustakas’ (1994) approach (as cited in Creswell, 2013). The first step of analysis began with me writing a full description of my experience with the phenomenon. This step called epoché was taken in an attempt to set aside my personal bias with educational reform. I cannot entirely eliminate my bias. However, recognizing my bias, kept me aware of it and helped me focus on the principals’ stories. The next step was to organize the interview data. Interview transcriptions were organized by reading them to discover an overview of what the principals were saying. The transcripts were read again to horizionalize the data. This was achieved by developing a list of significant statements that described how the principals
experienced educational reform (Creswell, 2013). Next, I collected the significant statements and wrote memos to discover key words and phrases from which themes and key linkages emerged (Creswell, 2013). Additionally, reflective notes were made while memoing and during the next coding step to stay cognizant of my bias.

After I organized the data and conducted memoing, I proceeded to code the data. The coding procedures I followed were underlining the themes in different colored highlighter as well as color coordinated post-it notes sticking in the margins. I read the data sources again to determine if I had missed data or had incorrectly focused on data. A continual process of reading and coding while deliberately searching for warrants to confirm or dispel assertions was crucial to the process of analysis (Erickson, 1985). Warrants are statements that support the assertions and provide evidence the participants shared about their experience. The data was then organized according to theme by placing data containing the same theme in the corresponding file. For example, I found that the principals promoted professional development for their staff focused on writing. I placed all statements discussing professional development for writing in the same file. After organizing the data into files based on themes, I searched for warrants that supported the assertions and were used to describe the principals’ experience with verbatim examples from the interview transcripts.

These procedures for organizing and analyzing interview transcripts provided insight to form the second round of interview questions and provided clues for behaviors to look for during observations. I followed the same data analysis procedures after the second round of interviews, observation field notes, and artifacts as the first round of interviews transcriptions described above. The process of reading, organizing, memoing, reflecting, interpreting, comparing, and classifying data was a continuous process through the first and second interviews, artifact
collection, and observations. As suggested by Yin (2011), I reviewed artifacts as soon as possible after their collection to determine their value. Additionally, I analyzed the field notes as soon as possible after collecting the information to weed out data not applicable and discover common links and themes found in interviews to couple analysis closely with my observations (Wolcott, 1995). Analyzing data obtained through documents provided further evidence to corroborate or dispel themes found in interviews and observations (Maxwell, 2013). Comparing and contrasting the different perspectives of the participants provided insight into varied aspects of the phenomenon and provided triangulation with multiple participants approaching the same experience (Polkinghorne, 2005). Taken as a collective whole, all of the data sources provided common linkages and themes as well as disconfirming evidence to the phenomenon as experienced by the principals. After organizing, coding, and analyzing all of the data sources, a description of the principals’ experience was written.

Writing down the experience of the principals included sharing vignettes that emerged from the data sources. These verbatim examples of the principals’ experience in implementing education reform provided textual descriptions of their lived experience. Presenting the principals’ story was important to describe their lived experience, not a theoretical viewpoint (Bevan, 2014). Specifically, the vignettes described examples of role expectations and strategies of the principals to implement educational reform. Next, I wrote down the structural description of the experience. This description included the setting and context of the common experience of the principals by describing how the implementation of educational reforms took place (Creswell, 2013). Finally, I concluded the written description with a composite account of what the principals experienced and the context of their experience. This interpretation and representation of the principals’ experiences captured the essence of the phenomenon.
Limitations

This section will cover the validity implications of this phenomenological study. The section will include validity threats and the strategies employed to provide validity to this study. Specifically, the use of triangulation and member checking will be explained.

Validity Threats

One validity threat to this study is researcher bias. I believe this to be a threat because I am in my twenty-second year teaching in high school. I have lived through three education reform changes in my career. Each of these changes has impacted not only my teaching but also my attitude and feelings for the reform changes. Identifying this threat was a vital step in the process of my study because I must be aware of my bias and take steps to prevent bias from convoluting analysis of the data (Maxwell, 2013).

Reactivity, or the influence of the researcher on the participants, may also be a validity threat in this study (Maxwell, 2013). I believe reactivity may be a threat because the principals I interviewed might answer the interview questions the way they thought I wanted them to or more likely, with information they believed should be the “correct” answer. This validity threat may occur due to the current education culture of public accountability.

Validity Strategies

A strategy to provide validity to this study was triangulation. By obtaining data from multiple sources (e.g. interviews, observations, and artifacts), the data analysis was enhanced to discover the real experience of the participants. Collecting data through two interviews per principal, observations, and artifacts provided me with rich data to analyze. As I analyzed the data, I was able to discover similarities and discrepancies in the principals’ statements. Triangulation supplied an avenue to offer a more credible conclusion of the study.
Another strategy I employed to strengthen validity was using member checks. This is the most effective method to avoid misreading the meaning of what the principals said (Maxwell, 2013). Member checking afforded the principals an opportunity to verify my interpretation of their statements or notify me of interpretations they deemed inaccurate. This process also provided a method to identify bias that may appear in my interpretation. Member checking allowed me to ensure the accuracy of the collected data.

**Summary**

The experiences of the six principals I interviewed provided the embodiment of principals’ perceptions and behaviors in the secondary school as they implemented educational reform. Utilizing phenomenological methods helped me obtain answers to my research questions. The lived experiences of the six principals will be described in Chapter 4.
CHAPTER IV. PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to investigate principals’ perceived roles as instructional leaders and the leadership strategies principals use to promote values and school culture, collaboration, professional development, risk taking, and feedback as they implement current educational reforms in rural Northwest Ohio’s secondary schools. The objective of this chapter is to analyze the rich data obtained from interviews, artifacts, and observations provided by six principals from rural Northwest Ohio public high schools.

Data were obtained from principals of Typology 1 and Typology 2 school districts in Northwest Ohio (Ohio Department of Education, 2015). The typologies were previously explained in Chapter Two. To review, the four major groupings of typologies, established by the Ohio Department of Education, are rural, small town, urban, and suburban. This study focused on rural public high schools in Northwest Ohio. Therefore, Typology 1 and Typology 2 schools apply. Typology 1 schools are rural with high student poverty and small student population. Typology 2 schools are rural with average student poverty and very small student population. Additionally, a parameter of a minimum of seven years of experience was imperative to obtain data from veteran principals. Superintendents’ permissions to recruit their principals were sought prior to contacting the six principals that participated in this study. Profiles of the six participants are presented in Chapter Three. On the next page is a table containing the findings from the data analysis. Following the chart are the findings obtained from data analysis of six high school principals from Typology 1 and Typology 2 schools in Northwest Ohio.
### Table 2
Findings from Data Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RQ # 1 - Role Perception</th>
<th>RQ # 2 - Leadership Strategies</th>
<th>Challenges for Rural Schools</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Practice distributed leadership</td>
<td>Build relationships</td>
<td>Facilitate Teacher Preparation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>collaboration</td>
<td>be positive</td>
<td>experience with former educational reforms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>open door policy</td>
<td>visibility</td>
<td>setting clear expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>working with small groups (TBTs, HSTW, BLTs, Dep't)</td>
<td>care for kids and teachers</td>
<td>curriculum mapping</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>obtain input from teachers for professional development</td>
<td>communication and constant conversations</td>
<td>providing professional development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>model behavior</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Findings

The data analysis revealed the essence of the principals’ lived experience as they lead their buildings through the maze of educational reforms in Ohio. Data collection and analysis focused on concepts regarding principals’ role perceptions and strategies used to implement Ohio’s Learning Standards and state assessments. The data will be reported by research question with corresponding themes that emerged through data analysis. An overarching concept that emerged from the data was the preeminence placed on students. For example, Ann wrote in her newsletter, “We will all work together to help our students – our number one priority” (Newsletter, September 8, 2017). Every principal stated that decisions, relationships, and building functions were based on the concept that students come first. Additionally, teacher handbooks, newsletters, and observations pointed to the emphasis on students. With the collective emphasis on students, principals’ role perceptions and strategies that emerged from the data showed principals ultimately help students through helping teachers.

Research Question #1

What do principals from secondary schools in Northwest Ohio perceive to be their role as instructional leaders concerning the implementation of Ohio’s Learning Standards and assessments?

Two themes emerged during the data analysis regarding the role perceptions of the principals in this study. The first theme was principals sought distributed leadership when making decisions. They sought to collaborate to achieve shared ownership among the staff especially regarding state standards and assessments. The second theme that emerged with principals’ role perception was their desire to build relationships within the building and the community. The principals revealed the vital importance of relationships in doing their jobs.
Principals believed the best role they could play in student outcomes was to provide teachers with the resources and culture in the building for teachers to reach students. Both themes will be discussed in this section.

**Distributed Leadership.** Principals expressed a desire to distribute leadership through collaboration by having an open door policy, working with small groups, and obtaining input from teachers for professional development. All of the principals expressed the desire to utilize collaboration to obtain buy-in and have shared ownership when making decisions concerning teaching Ohio’s Learning Standards and students taking state assessments. Not all, however, had always believed in a collaborative approach to leadership. Rick shared an example of an experience that shaped his current leadership philosophy. He stated that in his first year as principal he attempted to “just walk in and start telling people what to do”. He said that he soon realized that they had been there a long time and he couldn’t lead in a top-down manner. He stated, “What I need to be is the guy that enables the good teachers to do what they do and those teachers that need help I provide the help that they need. And I think I learned that luckily fairly quickly” (Personal communication, November 27, 2017). Brad, a veteran principal of twenty-nine-years, communicated his change in leadership philosophy that had changed over the years. He said, “It’s not me telling people what to do, but me trying to lead and go in a positive direction.” He stressed his servant leadership approach now is to lead with the idea that “we are all in this together” to make a difference in young people’s lives. Emphasizing her collaborative process with a Building Level Team, Jen stated, “That is where we hash through everything that our teachers are feeling and experiencing with the things occurring at the State level [new standards and assessments] …. It’s really a collaborative approach. It takes the teachers as well as the administration” (Personal communication, October 17, 2017). To emphasize the change in
their leadership philosophy, examples of Rick and Brad and their collaborative approach follow. Rick stressed the importance of working with individual departments and then those departments conducting cross curricular collaboration to work on curriculum maps that assist teachers with the new standards and develop course assessments to better prepare students for state assessments. Brad said, “Get adults together to talk about curriculum, to talk about things they could do to enhance learning opportunities for students, that’s a good thing” (Personal communication, October 19, 2017). Lee’s statement sums up the principals’ sentiment well: “[you need] more of a collaborative and distributive leadership approach to it. You definitely get more things accomplished . . . but if you try to push your vision, those goals, and you don’t get other people’s voices in, you are going to spin your wheels and it is going to be a lot tougher” (Personal communication, October 3, 2017). Principals stressed collaboration as a vital element to implement Ohio’s educational reforms. Following are specific approaches they utilized to accomplish the task.

All of the principals identified the policy of an open door as essential to promote collaboration and open communication as they worked to address concerns and implement state standards and assessments. For example, Ann stated, “The door’s open, come and talk with me…. Let’s talk about your issues. How we can raise our [state test] scores. Tell me what you think. So I keep it very low key. Very open communication with them” (Personal communication, November 7, 2017). When discussing communication with staff, Brad wrote in a staff memo, “I attempt to communicate in writing. I still believe face to face meetings are best . . . If you think there may be an issue arising, please see me in person if possible” (Staff memo, August, 2015). Further, Jen articulated that she had an open door and teachers were always coming to her office to discuss the steps needed to be successful and do what is being asked by
the state. Principals - Ann, Rick, Lee, and Jack - specifically recognized the balancing act with collaboration and an open door when making decisions. They acknowledged that decisions ultimately rested with them and not everyone will like every decision that is made. However, these principals expressed that they try to get as much input as possible. Jack’s statement sums up the principals’ sentiments of the balancing act well: “But saying yes with reasoning and saying no with reasoning, after doing your homework and showing you have done your homework, I think, fosters a very positive environment where everybody listens to everybody and decisions are made and the decisions at least are seen as sound” (Personal communication, October 16, 2017). Additionally, concerning the balance in decision making with collaboration, Rick and Brad stated that they did not like the term, “boss”. The two principals mentioned that, instead, they wanted to be seen as a member of the team in the building emphasizing teamwork to accomplish the building goals of teaching the standards and preparing students for state assessments.

Data analysis revealed that the most common form of specific collaboration that promoted teamwork to implement state standards and assessments was utilizing small group teams. Examples of teams included Building Level Teams (BLTs), Teacher Based Teams (TBTs), High Schools That Work (HSTW) teams, and Department Meetings. Principals - Rick, Lee, Brad, Jen, and Ann - particularly noted the significance of small group team work to gain optimal teacher input to analyze data and make decisions for curriculum mapping (determining when standards are taught and at what level in the department), classroom instruction (making sure that standards are taught), and determining professional development. Rick stated, 

We will do department meetings and we will start looking at test blueprints. We’ll look at our scores and see what areas we did well. What areas we missed. Make
sure that we get, make sure that our curriculum lines up the with test blueprint . . .
you know, kind of dig into the data a little bit deeper to find out what’s going on
and see what we can do to quickly fix major problems and then how can we just
slowly but surely improve the whole thing. (Personal communication, October 18,
2017)

Reports from the HSTW teams, TBTs, and department meetings revealed teachers in small
groups utilizing data to determine decision-making for teaching standards to prepare students for
state assessments. Lee shared that the partnership his school has with HSTW has afforded
wonderful opportunities for teachers to provide input and “an ownership level from the staff”.
His HSTW team proposed rearranging the class schedule to fifty minute academic periods with
an Academic Team Time during the week. This team time allows students and teachers to work
on focused content and assessment preparation in addition to class time. Lee further sought input
from teachers concerning the Academic Team Time through a survey. This provided a platform
for teachers to share what was working and not working and present ideas for improvement.
Brad underscored the importance of his Building Level Team to provide direction and the
Teacher Based Teams to improve cross curricular planning that would result in recommending
different approaches to teach standards. Additionally, Jack relied on input from his guidance
counselor and teachers for scheduling classes and academic assist times so that students would
be best served by classes offered and additional time offered during the school day for re-
teaching, further instruction, and assessment preparation when needed. These teacher
suggestions for scheduling were developed in the context of TBTs, HSTW teams, and
Department Meetings.
When asked about teacher input regarding professional development, principals were universally in favor of teachers providing input. Brad wrote in bold print in a staff newsletter, “upcoming all-day staff professional development day on March 24 provide input for what you would like to see done” (Staff memo, November 11, 2016). More specifically, Brad, Rick, and Jen expressed a concern that not enough teachers were attending professional development away from the building that would aid the teacher. They rationalized that teachers could then bring back knowledge gained and share with their colleagues. Rick specifically asserted that he wanted staff to go and get knowledge and then they would be recognized as experts in a particular area of writing, math, or assessments. He reasoned that by building capacity in this way, others could go to them for that expertise and the capacity would spread throughout the building and they would not need to solely rely on an outside source of experts. Jack and Lee expressed the desire to have teachers provide input into the professional development that the administration would bring to the district. They wanted to provide professional development that teachers would find the most useful and achieve staff ownership for buy-in. Jack stated, “So, we’re constantly looking as administrators at what we think could be valuable, but we won’t pull the trigger until we know that teachers can tell us that this is good” (Personal communication, October 16, 2017). Lee was adamant that data would determine the type of professional development. He stated that from the test scores, it revealed the greatest need in his building was writing across the curriculum so he would provide that type of professional development. Lee was just as adamant that he sought teachers’ suggestions as to the specific group or person to bring to the building. Lee reasoned, “If you can find the ones [professional development] where you’ve got other teachers presenting, I think more buy-in happens” (Personal communication, October 3, 2017).
He indicated that he has had good dialogue and positive staff ownership by seeking staff input for professional development.

Principals utilized different methods to obtain teacher input in professional development. Jack and Lee utilized surveys emailed to teachers to obtain their thoughts. Others utilized TBTs, HSTW teams, or Departments to provide ideas on the professional development teachers desired. Brad, a twenty-nine year veteran principal in Northwest Ohio, expressed a correlation he has found with low socio-economic status and low test scores. Regarding professional development and discussions Brad had with some of his teachers about poverty in the district, he stated, “So, ultimately, with that discussion I had a couple staff members that said, hey, there is a poverty conference. Could we get a group of teachers to go there? You know, when they take the initiative, I said absolutely. I had six teachers that attended a two day poverty conference” (Personal communication, October 19, 2017). He then described an initiative the teachers heard at the poverty conference. They approached him informally to express their aspiration to develop a similar initiative in their building. He worked with the teachers and the initiative was subsequently employed in the building. This example is indicative of teachers and a principal utilizing professional development and collaboration to help all students in the building.

**Build Relationships.** The second theme that emerged from the rich data provided by principals regarding their role perception is the vital importance of building relationships. The common methods principals shared to build relationships with teachers, students, and other stakeholders are communication, being positive, being visible, caring for teachers and students, and modeling behavior. There was a recognition by the principals that positive relationships were needed to accomplish anything including implementation of standards and assessments. Every principal in the study shared the importance of communicating regularly through formal and
informal means. They reported that regular and formal communication most commonly takes place in monthly teachers’ meetings, small group team meetings in the form of DLTs, BLTs, TBTs, HSTW teams, and department meetings. Most principals also stressed the effectiveness of communicating in smaller groups rather than larger staff meetings. Two vital areas of information that principals felt needed to be shared in these types of formal meetings are changes from the Ohio Department of Education concerning state standards and assessments including data from state test results. Lee stated,

So I definitely think breaking things down. We have a building leadership team, High Schools That Work team, break things into departments. Even in full staff meetings there are times when we will break off into smaller groups to work together to see, you know okay we have this mandate, these things coming in. How can we here at our school make that the best possible scenario for students and within the school community. (Personal communication, October 3, 2017)

Talking informally was a common sentiment with the principals. They also stressed that their small staff numbers were useful when communicating informally. When asked about building relationships and teacher morale, Rick stated,

Well part of it is just by being a regular guy. You just kind of walk around . . . You know talking about shopping with one teacher and talking about coaching with another, and with the other guy, the Ohio State - Michigan game . . . . So sometimes they have good days and sometimes they have bad days. And when they have bad days you need to be there to help pick them up. (Personal communication, November 27, 2017)
The importance of regular communication formally and informally was given as essential elements of building relationships. Principals commonly use staff memos or newsletters to regularly communicate with their teachers. Brad, for example, sends a weekly staff memo. Ann utilizes a bi-monthly newsletter to communicate.

Communicating, being positive, and being visible go hand in hand. Ann and Jack stressed the importance of being a problem solver and not a complainer - to be a positive influence. Ann, when sharing advice given to her by a mentor, especially stressed the importance of being positive. She stated, “You make the day yours. You make it the way you want it to be. And I choose to make it positive” (Personal communication, November 28, 2017). Ann’s newsletters back up her outlook. Ann is in her first year at her building and the district was experiencing changes with other new administrators. She was addressing the changes and transition with her staff in her newsletter writing, “I choose to look at change as something exciting, as a challenge” (Newsletter, September, 2017). Every principal stressed the importance of being visible in the building and in the community as another essential element to help build relationships. Of course, for most, attending events is a contractual requirement, but nonetheless, principals saw the importance of being visible. This was evident with the list of events the principals attended including ball games, plays, music concerts, board meetings. Additionally, principals shared examples of being in the cafeteria and in the hallways making positive comments as they greet teachers and students.

The moments of communicating positive thoughts and being visible also project the ethic of care. Every principal stated that the ethos of care was a vital component of building relationships. Principals conveyed many ways of showing that they cared for teachers and students: informal talk in the hallways, questions at lunch, encouragement throughout the school
year for school work and state test time, positive remarks concerning extra-curricular activities –
band concert, ball game, and cheering at pep assemblies. Brad’s weekly staff memos often contained comments that were positive and expressed care. Some examples from staff memos include: “Your Impact on Students is Priceless!”; “I appreciate the genuine concern each of you has for our students”, and “Please accept my sincere gratitude for all that each one of you do to make the school a great place to learn (and work)” (2016). Rick conveyed the importance of care for staff members who might be having a bad day and that his job is to pick them up. Rick continued with a specific example of a staff member who was caring for elderly parents and needed to take time off to take them to doctor’s appointments. He stated that he noticed the staff member came to school worried about it, so he told her that they would be flexible and work around it. When referring to care, he stated “That’s what it’s all about” (Personal communication, November 27, 2017). Jen, Brad, and Jack recognize students who displayed positive character traits by having a student of the month. For instance, a bulletin board stated, “Having a soft heart in a cold world is courage, not weakness”. This particular bulletin board had photos of students with a description of their act of “courage” attached to the photo. Jack believes that only being visible is not enough to truly express care for students and staff. He stated,

Being visible in the classrooms, being visible at extracurricular events. Having genuine conversations with students to let them know that I am interested in what it is that they do. Those little conversations, the little bits and pieces of showing interest helps you to build relationships with the kids, with the staff. You show that you care. (Personal communication, October 16, 2017)
Jack continued to articulate that care only from the top does not work. Care must filter through the staff, other students, custodians, and bus drivers to have a culture of care and building relationships in the building. The ethic of care, a prominent component of building relationships, also is part of showing students that they matter to the principal and that students are the reason the principals that participated in this study do what they do.

A final element of building relationships was to model behavior. This element was only briefly expressed by three principals in the study. For example, Rick stated, “As a leader you need to be out there in front and you need to not ask people to do things you wouldn’t do” (Personal communication, October 18, 2017). Ann shared that one of the primary methods she uses to promote her vision and goals is to model it. Specifically, model a positive attitude. Jack emphasized the vital importance of modeling behavior in both interview sessions. He stated, “If you have that kind of attitude [positive – problem solver], that frame of mind, I think it is a positive influence on everybody…. If I don’t, then we wouldn’t be getting anywhere. We wouldn’t be advancing ourselves as a district” (Personal communication, October 16, 2017). Although only briefly noted by three principals, the aspect of modeling behavior to others in their school relates to the role perception of these three principals.

Data analysis of principals’ role perceptions regarding Ohio’s Learning Standards and assessments revealed two themes. Principals sought to use collaboration to achieve distributed leadership and build relationships to guide their buildings through the maze of Ohio’s educational reforms. Data also revealed principals’ leadership strategies they used to implement Ohio’s Learning Standards and assessments.
Research Question #2

What leadership strategies do principals utilize to carry out implementation of Ohio’s Learning Standards and assessments in their school environment?

Two themes emerged in the data analysis regarding strategies principals use to implement Ohio’s Learning Standards and assessments. The strategies are directly related to teachers because teachers carry out the actual implementation of teaching the standards and preparing students for assessments. While analyzing the data after the first round of interviews, I originally placed the data in one large category, facilitating teacher instruction. However, after further coding and analysis of the second round of interviews and artifacts, it became evident that the data fell into two themes. The first theme, facilitating teacher preparation, concerns the strategies principals use to provide the training and resources teachers need as they prepare to teach students. The second theme, facilitating teacher instruction, involves the strategies principals utilize to help teachers in the classroom to teach students. Following will be the findings according to theme.

Facilitating Teacher Preparation. Principals in this study shared several strategies they utilized to provide resources to help prepare teachers to instruct their students including their experience with former educational reforms, setting clear expectations, curriculum mapping, and providing professional development. For example, Lee stated that it was vital to “make sure, first of all, that they [teachers] have the tools they need and resources” (Personal communication, October 3, 2017). All of the principals in this study were purposefully chosen with their years of experience in mind. I wanted to glean data from principals who had experienced previous educational reforms in Ohio. All of the principals in this study were building principals during No Child Left Behind, which brought new standards and the Ohio Graduation Test beginning in
2001. Race to the Top ushered in new standards and assessments in 2010 and Every Student Succeeds Act caused new assessments to begin in 2014. Specifically, three of the six principals in this study had retired from being building principals and have been rehired as building principals. These three - Rick, Brad, and Ann - all made comments that they had been through many educational reforms before when asked about how they guided their staffs through the most recent educational reforms. For example, when asked about how he prepared teachers for state standards and assessments, Rick stated,

> Well you know I think the biggest point is I went through proficiencies. I went through OGTs. And now I'm going through End of Course exams. And guess what guys, when I was at [a previous school] and they threw the proficiencies at us, the purpose was to show how bad of a job we were doing in the city schools. And they did the first year. But after a couple of years we figured it out and we got it fixed. So then once we figured it out, they said, well we need to change the rules again. So they did. Guess what, a couple years later we had it figured out. So, guess what folks, we will get it figured out. (Personal communication, November 27, 2017)

This quote reflects a common sentiment of all principals in this study and their perception of how the state conducts its reforms. There was not only a sense of frustration with the state’s educational reforms, but also a positive tone that they will navigate the most recent educational reforms too as they help teachers prepare for their students. Lee stated, “A lot of frustration from many, many principals and staff. The constant change from the state of Ohio in the last ten to fifteen years. I feel that at times it’s throwing darts and we are just scrambling to try to figure out what are we supposed to do as a school. Where am I supposed to get these kids? What test do
you want to do? What, you want this for a graduation requirement now? It’s constantly behind rather than being out ahead so to speak” (Personal communication, November 10, 2017). Lee did not dwell on his frustration, but expressed a “can do” attitude. He shared strategies for facilitating teacher preparation including professional development and departments working together to develop a standard for writing expectations in the building. Jack expressed the importance of having a positive attitude and focusing on solving problems and not concentrating on negatives. Brad and Jack especially emphasized, from their experience, the importance of setting clear expectations for students and teachers. They believed that when clear expectations are set, the people in the building will respond with positive outcomes. Jack, in particular, apparently clearly communicated expectations in his beginning of the year teacher’s meeting on August 17, 2017, concerning student discipline and teachers’ classroom management. The only items bold and in caps in the Opening Teachers’ Meeting Outline, were items concerning discipline in classrooms and in the building. For example, “CELL PHONES ARE NOT TO BE VISIBLE DURING SCHOOL HOURS”, WRITTEN DISCIPLINE (DEMERIT, ETC.) NEEDS TO OCCUR IN INSTANCE OF PLAGIARISM”, concerning Bathroom/Locker Breaks, “ONE AT A TIME!!!!!!”. Utilizing their experience, the principals in this study shared strategies they enacted to help prepare their teachers. For example, Ann, a 17-year veteran principal, but in her first year in her current building at the time of this study, expressed the need for curriculum mapping to prepare teachers to teach the proper standards with some bluntness:

So to be really honest, our test scores stink. They are really low. We have started looking at, as a matter of fact, we were just working on a PD (professional development) day where we were doing some vertical [mapping] . . . . It’s
basically getting all my math teachers together, 7-12 for instance or social studies or whatever. And then what is it you are teaching, when are you teaching, are you covering all of the standards that need to be. We are going to start with that.

(Personal communication, November 7, 2017)

Lee, a 15-year veteran and Rick, another retire-rehire, and in his third year at his current building, also focused on curriculum mapping with their staffs. They expressed the importance of this step in teacher preparation to teach students Ohio’s Learning Standards especially as the standards are in the process of revision at the time of this study. Specific to standards and assessments, Jack stated, “when we had the change to PARCC several years ago we had some professional development attached to that with the staff in terms of standards and implementation of Common Core” (Personal communication, October 16, 2017). Teacher preparation for Ohio’s Learning Standards and assessments were an additional focus of Rick, Jen, Brad, and Lee to provide the resources of time and small groups. These resources would enable the TBTs, HSTW team, and content area departments to analyze data and develop classroom strategies that would provide more comprehensive instruction and assessment to better prepare students for state testing. Principals felt that providing the resources for teachers to conduct curriculum mapping, data analysis, and assessment creation would be the best allocation of resources to prepare their teachers.

Principals shared that professional development was another vital strategy in teacher preparation. Teacher input with professional development was discussed earlier in this chapter in the context of principals collaborating with their staff. Professional development with this theme focuses on principals’ approaches to prepare teachers. Principals shared that most of the recent professional development focused on training teachers in technology. All of the school districts
of the principals interviewed recently acquired chrome books for each high school student. Additionally, in one situation, the high school is moving into a new building with new technology in each classroom. Principals shared that this training was essential for teachers to help their students in the classroom and get the most out of the technology available to teachers and students. Brad said it this way:

You have the world at your fingertips with the computer. And I think that's wonderful. The problem is - what I would love for kids to and everybody to understand is that the computer can't think for you. You have to be able to actually formulate ideas and come up with concepts and be able to work through problems. (Personal communication, November 27, 2017)

Additional professional development to prepare teachers was derived from data analysis. Three principals - Lee, Rick, and Jen - stated that data analysis of the state tests resulted in the need to provide training for teachers in writing across the curriculum. For example, Jen stated, “So, this year our big focus on PD is writing across the curriculum . . . looking at our end of course exam scores. You know, a lot of those extended response, they are not getting the points that they need on those” (Personal communication, October 17, 2017). Specifically, Rick’s strategy for writing was to provide time during the school day for his English Language Arts department to closely scrutinize the data and develop a plan to improve students’ writing. The plan would also include a rubric for other departments to follow for their writing procedures. Lee and Jen utilized the first professional development of the school year to focus on writing. Specifically, the professional development itinerary provided by Lee included “Literary Strategies” and “From Reading comprehension to Bridging Reading to Writing”. Each principal in this study concerned
themselves with utilizing strategies to facilitate teacher preparation. These strategies were enacted ultimately to teach Ohio’s Learning Standards and prepare students for state testing. 

**Facilitating Teacher Instruction.** Principals provided teachers with resources to prepare them for instruction as well as facilitate teachers’ instruction in the classroom. Instruction concepts principals were concerned about included who had responsibility for student outcomes, hiring the right teachers, reducing distractions for learning, providing a culture of innovation, and a dichotomy of teaching standards versus life skills. When asked who the principals believed was most responsible for student outcomes, principals’ answers varied. Upon analyzing the data, three variables for student achievement emerged. The variables are teachers, parents, and students. Most principals - Rick, Lee, Brad, and Ann - stated that they believed teachers’ instruction were of primary importance in student outcomes. Rick stated, “I think it still goes back to the teachers. They're the ones that see them [students] every day” (Personal communication, November 27, 2017). Varying some from Rick’s statement, Lee, Brad and Ann stated that teachers were primary, but they also included their belief that supportive parents were extremely important. Lee’s statement sums up their sentiment. “Parents will influence like they normally would with their kids. But when it comes to school, we’ve got ‘em. That’s a captive audience when they’re here so I think we can do a lot with the time we have them here at school” (Personal communication, November 10, 2017). With teachers being the emergent responsible figures for student outcomes, facilitating teacher instruction becomes a high priority for principals. Two principals, Jack and Jen, placed the onus of responsibility for student achievement on the students and parents. Jack stated,

Well there's two things I guess . . . from a want-to perspective, effort perspective, that solely rests with the individual. . . . I also think that parents play a major role
in their children's education. . . . Staying on top of their child's education process.
And there could be a number of things with that. Checking their grades. Simply
having a conversation at dinner about their day, about any concerns that they
have. I think that that's obviously very, very important. (Personal communication,
November 20, 2017)

Jack and Jen asserted that they had excellent teachers who were doing their job. They believed
that when you have supportive parents and students with positive attitudes, then teachers will be
able to do their job and instruct students. Further, the principals noted that parents’ attitudes
towards education directly impact the attitudes of their children thereby impacting students’
achievement.

Four principals - Ann, Jen, Lee, and Jack - reasoned that the very act of hiring the right
teachers is a strategy to facilitate teacher instruction. When discussing student achievement and
teacher instruction, Lee stated,

You know, if I hire a poor teacher in a classroom, every one of those students will
suffer. They are not going to necessarily grow and improve within their
knowledge base. But if I hire a great teacher, the impact will be tremendous. So it
goes hand in hand. I’ve got a lot of responsibility to try to make sure those
students have the best staff in place. (Personal communication, November 10,
2017)

These four principals described how they take time during the interview process to discover
teaching strategies candidates would use and the candidates’ understanding of learning standards
and assessments. All principals spoke of having quality teachers, pointing to the importance they
place on hiring the right teachers for their building. In fact, most of the principals used the descriptor “excellent” when describing their staff.

Another factor principals noted as facilitating teacher instruction was eliminating distractions for teachers. This was a primary concern. Jack described reducing distractions for students and teachers,

If you have a disciplined building, I think that is the biggest thing that removes not every obstacle but most the most important obstacles from learning. Things that prevent you from learning if you have a classroom, building, culture that say lacks discipline it just trickles, trickles from there. Kids aren't focused on their education. There's just lots of other things going that are conflicting with the educational process. . . . So now the staff doesn't have to worry itself with that. They don’t have to focus on those type of things. (Personal communication, November 20, 2017)

Additionally, Ann noted the importance of meeting the basic needs of students to aid in eliminating distractions from learning. She stated that if Maslow’s basic needs are not met, then students will not be successful in learning the standards or doing well on assessments.

Rick, Jen, Brad, Jack, and Lee described creating a culture of innovation for teachers. Rick and Jen specifically noted that they wanted a building culture where teachers are allowed to take risks and not be penalized if the new strategy did not work out the way intended. Rick said, “The key is, you’ve got to allow them to make mistakes” (Personal communication, October 18, 2017). Jen stated, “I feel like I need to prepare my teachers to be able to think outside the box” (Personal communication, November 28, 2017). To further expand on the point, she discussed a few strategies utilized to help prepare students for college and career. Therefore, initiatives were
established to provide platforms for teachers to help students become prepared. For example, she showed the new science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) lab that is used to create projects utilizing cross-curricular subjects and discussed curriculum added to provide hands-on activities to build life and work skills. Jen especially was concerned with preparing her students to enter the work force because a large percentage of her students would not attend college, but enter the work force upon graduation. She stressed that teachers had these skills to teach students and she needed to provide the platform for teachers to carry it out. Brad lauded the initiative his teachers took to develop a program to help all students in the building feel like they were a part of the school. He reasoned that the teacher-initiated program would correlate with improved test scores. Further, Lee encouraged his teachers to utilize strategies obtained from professional development. He stated, “[if teachers] see things that work, they could tweak things to work in their own classrooms” (Personal communication, October 3, 2017). Finally, the observation at Jack’s school was different from all of the others. He intentionally and proudly took me to classrooms that showed evidence of teachers utilizing advanced techniques in innovative STEM-type labs. The culture of innovation is closely related to professional development provided to train teachers to use technology in the classroom. Data analysis from artifacts, observations, and interviews revealed that the principals intended for their teachers to utilize technology with problem based learning, writing, and critical analysis of online primary and video sources. With each building recently acquiring personal computer devices for each student, the principals stressed that the training produced methods to facilitate teacher instruction to improve student learning.

Principals expressed an interesting dichotomy in facilitating instruction of Ohio’s Learning Standards. Some principals stressed the vital importance of teaching the standards in
preparation for the assessments. Other principals stressed that standards were important, but work and life skills were more imperative for their students than test scores. Principals especially focused on teaching the standards for test preparation were Lee, Rick, and Brad. Data analysis revealed that they provided resources and informal encouragement, and employed the Ohio Teacher Evaluation System to make sure that their teachers were teaching Ohio’s Learning Standards. Resources included providing professional development, bringing in Educational Service Center staff and the High Schools That Work agency to help teachers with instructional strategies. Ann and Jen explained that their teachers teach the standards, but the most important instruction was teaching skills for their students to graduate and be prepared to work. They both stressed that this factor was important and emphasized in their respective communities. Jen expressed,

I guess it probably goes back to this whole Workforce Development path that I'm currently on. . . . I get a lot of pressure from manufacturers in the area calling me almost daily. Hey do you have kids? Do you have anybody that's interested in this area? We’ll get him out here and get them trained so that know they're coming into once they graduate. That to me is something that I did not anticipate, but yet the community and the changes in society and philosophy has pushed me to go down that path. (Personal communication, November 28, 2017)

Ann also conveyed that her philosophy matches the influence of the community on not being a proponent of state testing, but emphasizing having skills to enter the workforce instead. Jack articulated his position of not emphasizing test scores or just teaching the standards. He said that he didn’t want teachers to sacrifice what they were already doing based on the new standards. The teachers were utilizing one-to-one technology with problem based strategies and
if you strictly looked at the standards, then the students would be losing out. He further stated, “In other words, our staff is doing a fantastic job with a lot of innovative approaches. . . . We [administration] also stressed to them that, hey, continue to do the great things that you are doing in the classroom and the tests will kind of take care of themselves” (Personal communication, October 16, 2017). Principals varied on specific strategies to provide help to teachers in the classroom. However, every principal conveyed the vital importance of facilitating teacher instruction to aid student achievement.

**Challenges for Rural Schools’ Principals**

Data analysis revealed additional findings of the participants’ lived experiences as high school principals implementing educational reforms in rural Northwest Ohio. While I was coding and discovering themes for Research Questions #1 and #2, more themes emerged from the data that were more salient than expected. These additional concepts surfaced when the principals were reflecting on their situation as a rural high school principal. The concepts include close-knit communities, students’ lack of perceived available opportunities outside the community, low socioeconomic status (SES), lack of resources, the many hats principals wear, and their perception of state educational reforms.

Ann, Jack, and Brad referred to the concept of being part of a close-knit community and the manner it often feels like a family. Ann shared her appreciation of the positive aspect of this closeness because she could call a parent and more easily work out problems because they knew each other. Additionally, she pointed out that in her current school, everyone knows everyone else and if something good happens they all celebrate. If something unfortunate happens, they hurt. She revealed a situation that occurred the week before our interview. A brother of a student died and the community rallied around the family in their grief. Similarly, Jack related that a
family in his current district lost all of their belongings in a fire and within twenty-four hours, the community had the first of several benefits to assist them. Jack further expressed his perspective on the aspect of being an educational leader in a close knit community. He shared,

For better or worse, you live in a fish bowl....Because no matter where you go or what you’re doing, people are always watching....I think in an urban district, you have the ability to blend in a little bit more. Not that that’s bad or good....I wouldn’t trade it for anything because that’s also a great part of the fabric of being in a rural district. (Personal communication, October 16, 2017)

Brad also referred to his current school as having a family atmosphere. On one hand, he considered the family concept being positive for the feeling of safety and everyone being part of everyday life and the support that provides. However, Brad also conveyed what he sees as a negative aspect of a small rural community. He stated,

I think it probably lessens some of our students thinking. What’s out there? What are some other possibilities that they could do....I just kind of see that as holding a lot of kids back because they don’t have the expectation of going on and moving on. (Personal communication, October 19, 2017)

Lee offered a similar perspective. He also shared concern that students in his community do not recognize the importance of prioritizing education or recognize the opportunities that await outside the community. Additionally, Lee lamented that many students have tremendous potential to go to college or get training, but only see their prospects of the future as working on the family farm or local auto body business. Rick, who spent 32 years of his 39-year educational career in large urban schools in Ohio, expressed an interesting perspective on his current close knit community. He maintained,
It’s interesting and as long as I have anonymity, I can speak. [he laughed] The truth of the matter is, in small schools they all have those important things.

Beyond education. My town is a football town. If the football team is doing well, then guess what, the rest of the world is doing fine….They [community] saw our report card. I didn’t get a phone call. (Personal communication, October 18, 2017)

Ann and Brad specifically noted the low socioeconomic status (SES) of their rural schools as being significant to their position as high school principals. Ann referred to the low SES of her district when lamenting on low test scores and the lack of importance parents place on state assessments. She continued that the emphasis of the community was on getting a job after graduation and not state assessments. Ann asserted, “It’s not a realistic expectation. Kids graduating. Yes. Kids being prepared for the future. Yes. So that’s where I start from” (Personal communication, November 7, 2017). Brad noted that poverty in his current district was a problem, but not as severe as in other places. He continued to note that teachers, and educational leaders search for answers for struggling students. Brad, referring to his 29 years of experience, maintained that one correlation for test scores lies with the socio economic background of the parents. As I noted above in the discussion of collaboration, his building teachers attended a poverty conference and brought an idea from that conference to implement an initiative to help the students in poverty with the intended result of improved student achievement.

Another challenge noted by some rural school principals was a lack of resources. Rick, Ann, and Lee specifically asserted that they did not mean lack of money. These three principals noted that staffing was the primary lack of resource. They lamented the lack of course offerings including Advanced Placement (AP), College Credit Plus (CCP), and International Baccalaureate (IB) courses as means to improve student achievement especially for gifted
students and the relationship of these courses to the state report card. Rick specified that the report card score considers many categories including, among others, student achievement, gifted students’ improvement on test scores, and the number of students taking AP, CCP, and IB courses. Rick noted that he was able to offer several College Credit Plus courses, but no Advanced Placement or International Baccalaureate courses. Further, Rick expressed thankfulness for the work the Educational Services Center provides to his building, but wished that he had a full-time curriculum coordinator in the building. Ann indicated that she could not offer AP, CCP, or IB courses due to lack of staffing and the small number of students in her building. Ann and Lee stated that finding staff within certain subject areas including foreign language, math and science has become more difficult. They both reasoned that the lack of quality applicants rested with their rural location and the lack of industry and other quality jobs available for spouses. Further, Lee and Jen asserted their frustration with the lack of resources for state assessment preparation. They acknowledged resources were available through the Ohio Department of Education (ODE) website, but those resources were deficient. Lee specifically expressed consternation that with the state proficiencies and Ohio Graduation Test, ODE provided more resources and individual companies produced different resources schools could purchase to aid in test preparation.

Reflecting on their position as principals of rural high schools, every principal interviewed shared the dilemma of the necessity to wear many hats. Rick, who served eight-years as a principal in urban high schools and the last seven at rural high schools, was emphatic. He stated,

There’s just not enough people to do everything that the state needs to get done.

You know, I mean I have to be an expert in curriculum. I’ve got to handle
discipline. I’ve got to deal with the juvenile justice system. I’ve got to deal with jobs and family services. . . . you’re supposed to go to these meetings. You’ve got to go to this game. You’ve got to show up at this dinner. You’ve got to be at this . . . there’s just so many different hats to wear and you can’t be good at all of them. I don’t care who you are. And you know part of it is just trying to keep track of everything that the state wants you to keep track of. (Personal communication, October 18, 2017)

Lee, also with experience in an urban high school, affirmed Rick’s position, asserting that “you’ve got to be the jack of all trades and master of none” because of the many hats he was required to wear. Ann’s statements did not disagree with the many hats to wear, but she held a positive perspective. She viewed wearing many hats as a challenge and exciting to be able to fulfill many roles in the course of the day. This fit her whole philosophy of educational leadership – be positive. Jen expressed the importance of planning ahead to help with her many duties. Jen also noted the advantage she had of delegating some daily responsibilities to her assistant principal. She affirmed that delegating certain duties helped her focus on the state educational reforms. I need to note that Jen is the only principal among the participants of this study that had an assistant. Jack, who does not have an assistant, and by virtue of his current simultaneous positions as high school principal and district superintendent, wears many hats. During the course of both interviews, he described several incidents where he underscored the importance of honest and prompt communication, being “uber” organized, and proactive to successfully navigate his days. Additionally, Jack stressed the importance of having, and he emphasized this, a VERY GOOD veteran staff. He stated that this “was a crucial, crucial asset”.

Jack’s dual position lends an interesting perspective on, not only the challenge of wearing many hats, but also dealings with Ohio’s educational reforms.

The final salient theme in this section is the perception of the leaders of rural schools in Northwest Ohio with respect to Ohio’s educational reforms. Jack’s sentiments reveal a common theme among the principals in this study. He asserted that the number one challenge he faces is “getting our voice heard” when it comes to the educational reforms in Ohio. He said, “I think it’s fair to say that a lot of these educational changes are a result of the urban schools struggling. And I think the report card and calculations that are made reflect that” (Personal communication, October 16, 2017). Additionally, Jack expressed concern about the ill-conceived, one-size-fits-all mandates that force achieving schools to travel down a road they don’t want to go and shouldn’t have to go. He stated that he understands why the initiatives were passed, but feels that the state should allow for exceptions to the schools that are performing well. He cited the Ohio Teacher Evaluation System (OTES) as an example. Further, Jack acknowledged that he felt better about rural schools getting their voice heard due to recent conversations with the current state superintendent at the time of this study. However, he maintained that ultimately urban schools and their situation will drive what legislators do. Other principals’ comments reflected these sentiments. Lee lamented the lack of local control over educational reforms, explaining that suburban and urban schools are all impacted differently by educational reforms mandated by the state. Jen concurred stating,

I think they [ODE] just need to realize what rural school districts need. What their needs are - because I think a lot of decisions that are made at the state level are made to probably impact all of the inner city and the larger districts that they see out there. And that we are sort of a different breed in the outskirts in the rural
areas…. I feel like sometimes the state sets us up for failure just because they
don't get the big picture of what our needs are. (Personal communication,
November 28, 2017)

Rick, experienced in urban and rural schools, believed that the decision-makers in Columbus do
not understand the impact of their initiatives on small or big schools. Additionally, Rick
expressed concern about the validity of Ohio’s mandated reforms and their impact on the state
report card as it applied to the reality in his school concerning gifted students and college credit
course offerings. He asserted, “You know, when I look at our data, 30%-40% of our students will
end up going to college. The rest will go into the work force, the military, or some other
direction. So, are they going to worry about AP or IB? No. But what we need to do is give them
the basic skills and the ability to think, make good decisions understand the world around them
and be able to adjust as they go through life” (Personal communication, October 18. 2017). Brad
contended that too much change has occurred from the legislature, noting he has seen the
pendulum swing back and forth several times during his thirty-seven years in public education.
Brad stated that he is for productive change. Not just to try something new or because someone
at the top says to change. He believes that the local school district knows best what those
changes should be for the district. The final principal in this study, Ann, talked the least about
rural schools’ voice regarding Ohio’s educational reforms. However, she did note her perception
of the unrealistic emphasis the state places on state assessments and unrealistic expectations the
state places on students to attend college. She stated, that in her community, graduation and
getting a job are the priorities. All of the principals asserted displeasure with the state’s apparent
insufficient understanding of their rural small school situation.
Summary

The data conveyed in this chapter answers the research questions on principals’ role perceptions, strategies used to promote Ohio’s Learning Standards and assessments, and provided additional themes regarding rural schools. The data revealed that principals utilize distributed leadership and collaboration to make decisions and build relationships to carry out their role as building leader. Additionally, the data revealed that principals used varied strategies to facilitate teacher preparation and instruction. Finally, data revealed these rural high school principals contend with several factors including close knit communities, students not seeing opportunities outside the community, low socioeconomic status (SES), lack of resources, the many hats principals wear, and their perception of state educational reforms.
CHAPTER V. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Modern educational reforms in the United States have been driven by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) reports of United States students’ scoring at or below average on international tests and the *A Nation at Risk* report on public education in the United States (Kenna & Russell, 2014; Toscano, 2013). The recommendations of the OECD and public pressure have prompted the federal government to enact educational reforms including No Child Left Behind, Race to the Top, and Every Student Succeeds Act (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). These federal educational reforms incentivized and required states, including Ohio, to enact their own educational reforms (Burke, et al., 2013; Kenna & Russell, 2014; Layton, 2014; Toscano, 2013; Wallender, 2014). Principals, tasked with implementing educational reforms, found themselves in a difficult position with little training on new skills needed for this new job (Alvoid & Black, 2014). Studies on educational leadership investigated the role of principals shifting from building manager to improving teaching and learning began based on the finding of the report, *A Nation at Risk* (Hunt, 2008). The role shift included studies in the 1980s and 1990s that examined strategies principals could utilize to effectively guide staff and students through twenty-first century educational reforms (Hallinger & Wang, 2015). For example, Eilers and D’Amico (2012) stated that school leaders have the responsibility to lead their buildings through the maze of change to implement educational reforms.

Addressing the needs of principals to implement twenty-first century educational reforms, models were developed to illustrate successful strategies and the situational context principals’ encounter. Hallinger (2011) developed a synthesized model of leadership for learning based on instructional leadership research. The model addresses leadership values, leadership
focus on indirect means to improve student achievement, the context for leadership, and sharing leadership. This model is valuable to inform principals’ view of their role and strategies they use to implement educational reform.

The review of literature revealed a gap in research regarding principals’ experience of implementing educational reforms in rural high schools in general and specifically in Northwest Ohio. Rural schools face unique circumstances from their urban and suburban counterparts. With the continual educational reforms being enacted by Ohio’s General Assembly and compulsory policies established by the Ohio Department of Education, this dissertation examines the role perception and strategies of high school principals in their context. The results of this study will provide valuable information for principals and others regarding implementation of educational reforms in rural Northwest Ohio.

**Overview of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to investigate principals’ perceived roles as instructional leaders and the leadership strategies principals use to promote values and school culture, collaboration, professional development, and risk taking as they implement current educational reform in Northwest Ohio’s secondary schools. A qualitative phenomenological method was utilized to examine the two research questions for this study. phenomenology was employed because this method is concerned with identifying the lived world perceived by persons experiencing the same situation (Lester, 1999). Further, phenomenology is concerned with understanding the social context from the perspectives of those involved in the same situation (Welman & Kruger, 1999). This study intended to obtain the stories of six principals implementing Ohio’s educational reforms to answer the following research questions:
1. What do principals from secondary schools in northwest Ohio perceive to be their role as instructional leaders concerning the implementation of Ohio’s Learning Standards?

2. What leadership strategies do principals utilize to carry out implementation of Ohio’s Learning Standards and assessments in their school environment?

Discussion of Findings

The final step of this study is to interpret the findings. It is vital to analyze all of the data and untangle the experiences the principals shared. This chapter will attempt to decipher the lived experiences of principals’ data presented in Chapter Four.

As a twenty-two year veteran teacher, I have experienced many of the educational reforms outlined in this study. Therefore, it becomes important to recognize my experience with modern educational reform and my preconceived ideas leading into this study. The first dramatic educational change I experienced was ushered in with No Child Left Behind (2002). The Ohio Department of Education, in accord with the federal mandate, established new curriculum and standardized testing. The curriculum mapping and classroom instructional adjustments to prepare students for high stakes testing caused frustration mingled with a can do attitude. However, just when I thought the new processes were figured out, a new educational reform appeared in the form of Race to the Top (2009). My school district opted to receive the federal grant money. I was selected by my principal to be on the district and building level committees to develop a plan and carry out the provisions of Race to the Top. Being part of the inner workings of the educational reform at my school district caused me to appreciate the leadership of the school district. As a teacher leader helping teachers transition to new curriculum, new assessments, and a new evaluation system, I could identify with the position principals were placed in when leading a building through change. Again, just as the transition phase ended and implementation
began, another reform was passed. In 2015, the Every Student Succeeds Act was passed putting into motion a revision of curriculum, assessments, and evaluation once again. My experience with the seemingly never ending educational upheaval caused frustration, but also created a unifying factor for the teachers and principals in my building. Since 2001, there have been two principals leading my building. They had different perspectives and utilized different strategies to lead the building through the maze of educational reform. My desire to study principals’ role perception and strategies to implement educational reforms stems from my experience working under these principals during this time of educational reform.

This study should benefit rural high school principals especially, and principals from other typologies, as educational reforms continue to roll out of state capitals across the nation and the federal government. Additionally, policy makers could benefit from this study in light of the angst experienced by principals as they feel that their voice is unheard in the state capital. Policy makers could provide more meaningful reforms by obtaining an understanding of the position public schools are in and work to improve communication and collaboration.

Hallinger’s (2011) synthesized model of leadership for learning, the theoretical framework for this study, is briefly described in Chapter One. A thorough investigation of the model is contained in Chapter Two. To summarize briefly here, the synthesized model of leadership for learning provides a broad view of instructional leadership attributes. Instructional leadership studies focused on the principal. Leadership for learning merges instructional leadership attributes with a broad range of leadership elements. First, the model denotes that principals operate within organizational and societal contexts. These contexts include societal culture, the institutional system, the school organization, and staff and community characteristics. Second, the personal characteristics of the principals impact their behaviors. The
personal characteristics include beliefs, values, knowledge, and experience. Third, principals do not directly impact student outcomes. However, principals do influence vision and goals, academic structures and processes, and people capacity. These components of the school directly impact student achievement. Fourth, the focus of the principal ultimately is on student outcomes through recognizing the context, utilizing personal characteristics, and influencing those components that directly impact student achievement. These elements are noted in the model and described by the following dimensions: values leadership, leadership focus, the context for leadership, and sharing leadership (Hallinger, 2011). In the discussion that follows, each theme from the present study will be summarized including the manner the themes fit into Hallinger’s (2011) leadership for learning model followed by recommendations for leadership.

Role Perception

The research question focused on the role perception of high school principals as they implement Ohio’s Learning Standards and assessments in their buildings. Two themes, distributed leadership and building relationships, emerged from the data analysis.

**Practice Distributed Leadership.** Principals believed their role was to provide an environment to make collective decisions regarding implementation of educational reforms. They communicated a desire to attain shared ownership with staff through distributed leadership and collaboration. Bossert’s (1982) effective schools research found that positive change occurs when principals make sure teachers feel involved and committed to change. Three of the six participating principals in the present study began their administrative careers using a top-down approach. Through experience, they came to believe that their role was to not be the sole decision-maker when determining ways to implement Ohio’s Learning Standards and assessments. The findings of the present study are similar to those of previous studies, where
researchers found that shared decision-making with teachers and other school leaders is a vital element of instructional leaders’ practices (Hallinger, 2003; Hallinger, 2011; Leithwood et al., 2006; Robinson et al., 2008; Spillane and Hunt, 2010). Instructional leadership practices were found in the data from this study and are reflected in the theoretical framework model. The use of collaboration by the present study’s participants fits into the sharing leadership dimension of Hallinger’s (2011) leadership for learning model. The sharing leadership dimension includes distributed leadership and collaboration as important elements of instructional leadership (Hallinger, 2011). Additionally, Hallinger (2011) stated that sharing leadership is the collective work of principals, teachers, and other school leaders to establish goals, make decisions, allocate resources, and adopt programs.

Principals in the present study utilized sharing leadership methods, including an open door policy and small groups to provide an environment of collaboration to implement educational reforms and provide quality professional development. The principals’ methods in this study support instructional leadership research that in order to be effective, collaboration is a practice that must permeate every aspect of a principal’s practices (Fullan, 2011; Hallinger, 2011; Hallinger & Heck, 2010; Qian & Walker, 2013; Waldron & McLeskey, 2010). Principals recognized the balancing act necessary to obtain staff input with an open door policy and still have the authority to make the final decision. In addition to an open door policy, principals in this study believed that small groups were vital to provide an environment that maximized teacher input especially regarding implementation of standards and assessments. Two principals specifically noted that small group meetings, not whole staff meetings, are effective in obtaining the optimum input from teachers. Effective schools have principals who utilize instructional leadership strategies to provide teacher groups with standardized test results to monitor student
progress (Hallinger & Wang, 2015; Hallinger & Heck, 1985). Principals held regularly scheduled whole staff meetings, but recognized that the real work was accomplished in small group settings. Small groups were typically organized based on subject area departments so they could work on their particular content areas. They analyzed data from state assessments, organized curriculum maps, and offered suggestions of strategies to use based on their analyses. Three of the six participating principals in this study shared specific information from these analyses. They revealed that the most common problem with students’ scores were with writing and sought professional development to address the writing issue. Two principals organized cross-curricular groups to develop a unified plan to be used in the entire building. Instructional leaders achieve school goals through group processes, consensus building, and communication (Murphy et al., 2007). Principals believed this collaboration among teachers would provide the best shared ownership and positive results in student achievement.

Principals universally desired to obtain input from teachers for professional development opportunities and this approach is supported in the research. Instructional leaders’ promotion and provision of professional development to effectively use data is vital to implement state standards (Blau & Presser; 2013; Killion & Hirsh, 2013; Schildkamp & Kuiper, 2010). Input from teachers was sought through several means including surveys, small group meetings, and informal conversations. Principals also expressed their desire for teachers to spend more time attending outside professional development they could bring back to the building and share with colleagues. Utilizing distributed leadership was a primary method the principals utilized to obtain shared ownership with teachers to make decisions that to implement Ohio’s Learning Standards and assessments.
**Build Relationships.** A second theme that emerged from the data to answer my role perception question was the vital importance principals placed on building relationships with staff, students, and other stakeholders. Principals used communication, being visible, and modeling behavior to be positive and express care. Principals primarily used formal communication through staff meetings and department meetings to relay information regarding standards and assessments. They were cognizant that these types of formal communications helped with collaboration and distributed leadership, but were not effective means to build relationships with staff. Principals believed that building relationships and thereby creating a positive environment was imperative to leading a building through the maze of educational reforms.

A primary function for an instructional leader to develop a positive learning environment is to maintain high visibility to promote values, obtain information, and improve interaction with teachers and students (Bossert et al., 1982; Hallinger & Wang, 2015; Hallinger & Heck, 1985). Informal communications were the preferred means to build relationships for principals in this study. Principals acknowledged that ball games and other school functions were occasions for informal communications. Principals acknowledged that attending school functions was part of the job, but they recognized that these venues also provided opportunities to be visible and build relationships with the community and show support to staff and students. Other means of informal communication included times of talking to staff and students in the hallway, lunch room, or other common areas. These were moments to connect, not avoid the congestion that naturally occurs in these spaces. Principals recognized that these were particular times they could be visible and personally demonstrate care and encouragement to staff and students. One principal shared that she especially targeted the lunch room to connect with students and offer
encouragement. Principals were passionate when talking about how they cared for their teachers and students and their desire to let them know that they did care. Principals believed that these moments helped build morale in the building and were necessary to help teachers and students do their best.

Principals also noted that these occasions of informal communication with the community, staff, and students afforded them the opportunity to model positive behavior as they built relationships. Two principals particularly stressed the importance of promoting a positive culture in their buildings by sharing their positive attitude with teachers and students. Lynch (2016) noted expectations of principals included communicating effectively with teachers and students and modeling appropriate behavior. Murphy et al. (2007) stated that instructional leaders will model behavior to promote accountability and achieve school goals. Kouzes and Posner’s (2002) findings stated that modelling behavior is making personal involvement to gain respect and encouraging members of an organization by celebrating with them and caring for them. Their research provides insight into behaviors and values exemplary leaders utilize. In addition to modeling behavior, Kouzes and Posner’s (2002) practices of exemplary leaders include inspiring a shared vision, challenging the process, encouraging the heart, and enabling others to act. These five leader behaviors depend on building relationships to shape school culture and accomplish the collective task of implementing educational reform.

Building relationships is an element of instructional leadership found in the values leadership dimension of Hallinger’s (2011) leadership for learning synthesized model. Values leadership entails the values, beliefs, knowledge, and experience that leaders develop to not only develop goals, but also the methods to achieve these goals (Hallinger, 2011). The principals in this study utilized the means of building relationships to show care, provide encouragement, and
model behavior with teachers and students – all elements of instructional leadership found in Hallinger’s (2011) model. Burns and Martin (2010) stated the importance of principals being people-oriented. According to Bricker (1993), Aristotle said that we must behave ethically to be ethical; the principals in the present study -operated with these values. Principals’ actions demonstrated care. For example, one principal noted that his job was to pick people up that were having a bad day. He gave an illustration where he worked with a teacher to cover her classes when she had to unexpectedly miss work for a stressful family circumstance. The attempt to establish a positive environment through collaboration and relationship building coincides with the description of values leadership in the literature. The ethic of care is exemplified in the process of growing in devotion to others, holding relationships to a high level, and promotes a climate of growth (Mayeroff, 1995; Noddings, 2012; Starratt, 1991). The principals in this study reasoned that through accomplishing their role of building positive relationships, the implementation of Ohio’s Learning Standards and assessments were more likely to be successful and student achievement would improve.

**Recommendations for Leadership.** Principals in this study believed that their roles to implement Ohio’s Learning Standards and assessments were to foster distributed leadership and build relationships. Eilers and D’Amico (2012) identified roles principals need to fulfill to successfully guide their buildings through educational reforms: establishing a vision, promoting values, encouraging collaboration, promoting professional development, encouraging risk taking, and providing feedback to faculty. The principals’ behaviors support the literature.

Principals seeking to provide a positive building culture to implement standards and assessments will utilize distributed leadership and build relationships with teachers, students, and stakeholders to obtain shared ownership with teachers. Principals working with teachers can
respond to educational reforms in the best manner (Elmore, 2005). The principals in this study believed in the power of small group collaboration to achieve the best results from teachers. The role of principals in this study to work with teachers in small groups is beneficial to analyze data and share ideas. Qian and Walker (2013) stated that professional development should be specific to the needs of teachers. Based on the data analysis, principals in this study sought to achieve this. The principals’ role of building relationships confirms the values leadership literature that building relationships is vital to vision and goal setting, positive culture, and working together to build an effective school (Fullan 2011; Hallinger, 2011; Hess, 2013; Kouzes & Posner, 2002). It must be noted that distributed leadership practices did not occur in isolation of principals’ role perception in answering research question one. These practices were utilized in conjunction with the strategies for teacher preparation and instruction to implement Ohio’s Learning Standards and assessments and provide an answer to research question two.

**Leadership Strategies**

Research question 2 focused on leadership strategies high school principals utilize to implement Ohio’s Learning Standards and assessments. Two themes, facilitation of teacher preparation and teacher instruction, emerged from the data analysis. A summary of each theme will be described including the manner the themes fit into Hallinger’s (2011) leadership for learning model followed by recommendations for leadership.

**Facilitate Teacher Preparation.** Principals in this study shared strategies they used to help teachers prepare to implement Ohio’s Learning Standards and assessments. All of the principals in this study had several years of experience. However, three were retire-rehires. These three, in particular, stressed the benefits their experience provided to help prepare teachers and guide their staffs through educational reforms. After all, they stated that they had done it
several times. The principals used their knowledge and experience to focus their strategies on setting expectations; organizing small groups for curriculum mapping, analysis, and idea generation; and providing quality professional development.

Principals’ strategies to facilitate teacher preparation affirmed research findings in the literature. These strategies fit into Hallinger’s (2011) leadership for learning model in the leadership focus dimension. The elements of leadership focus include vision and goals, academic structures and processes, and people capacity. The principals’ strategies to facilitate teacher preparation in the present study fit into the vision and goals and people capacity elements of the dimension. Principals’ strategies supported the literature as they set clear expectations during the beginning-of-the-year meetings and regular monthly meetings with staff. One principal stressed setting clear expectations as his highest priority beginning with the first teacher meeting of the year before school began. The only notes in his agenda in all caps and bold related to setting clear expectations. One of the seven correlates of effective schools is instructional leaders establishing a climate of high expectations (Lezotte, 1991). Additionally, Murphy et al. (2007) stated that expectations were needed to promote best practices focused on student achievement. Learning focused vision and goals promote a major impact on student achievement (Hallinger, 2011; Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Witziers, Bosker, & Kruger, 2003). Principals in this study believed clear expectations communicated the vision and goals for the staff while establishing conditions for positive outcomes.

Principals’ strategies to facilitate teacher preparation included utilizing small groups for data analysis, curriculum mapping, and recommendations for professional development. These functions of small groups played a role in preparing teachers to implement standards and prepare students for state assessment. These small groups of teachers in the same content area worked
together to determine when content standards are taught and by whom. This practice helps each teacher in a department know better what to prepare. Curriculum mapping and data analysis of state assessments within small groups also provided an opportunity for teachers to share ideas within the department and across departments when meeting as cross-curricular small groups. Two principals in particular provided opportunities for departments to meet and then organized cross-curricular meetings to increase collaboration. This small group strategy is supported by instructional leadership research. Instructional leaders that encourage dialogue among teachers, improved efficiency, critical thinking, and student achievement (Eilers & D’Amico, 2012; Mombourquette & Bedard, 2014; Murray, 2014). Principals believed the cross-curricular groups also provided an avenue to promote common preparation and teaching methods teachers deemed necessary.

Finally, principals were intentional about building people capacity through seeking teacher input to provide quality professional development. This element fits into the people capacity aspect of the leadership focus dimension of Hallinger’s (2011) leadership for learning model. People capacity occurs when instructional leaders promote formal and informal professional development for teachers (Murphy et al., 2007; Robinson et al., 2008). Robinson et al. (2008) stated that the largest instructional leader behavior impacting student achievement was the principal’s support and participation in professional development. Providing essential professional development was the strategy most emphasized by principals when they talked about preparing teachers to implement standards and assessments. Seeking teachers’ input into the type and focus of professional development was a vital element to determining the most valuable training for teachers. Unanimously, principals believed that obtaining quality training for teachers whether outside the building or bringing professional development to teachers within
the building was vital for successful implementation of standards and assessments. Principals employed several strategies to help teachers prepare to implement Ohio’s Learning Standards and assessments.

**Facilitate Teacher Instruction.** Principals used several strategies to facilitate teacher instruction. They included hiring of teachers, reducing distractions, providing a culture of innovation, and teaching the state standards. When talking about teacher instruction, the subject of who is most responsible for student outcomes arose. The principals offered varying ideas. Four of the principals believed that teachers played the largest role in student achievement. Two of the four stated that teachers were primary, but parents also played a role in student outcomes. The remaining two principals believed that parents and students shared the responsibility for student achievement. This discussion pointed to the importance of instruction as primary in students’ learning.

Like facilitation of teacher preparation, facilitation of teacher instruction strategies fit into the leadership focus dimension of Hallinger’s (2011) leadership for learning model. The specific element of the leadership focus dimension that applies is academic structures and processes in a school. A strategy principals believed they used to facilitate teacher instruction was hiring the right teachers. The principals reasoned that the act of hiring the right teacher was a vital strategy for facilitating teacher instruction. These principals stressed that a part of the interview process was spent on the candidates’ standards knowledge and instructional techniques so the principal could hire the right teacher. Another strategy principals employed to help teacher instruction and applies to academic structures and processes was providing a building environment that reduced distractions from learning. A mark of instructional leaders to reduce distractions is supported by research that an orderly and supportive climate is necessary for student learning (Lezotte, 2001;
Robinson, et al., 2008). Principals argued that when students are focused on their education, then real learning could take place.

Data analysis from interviews and observations revealed that some principals wanted to provide a culture of innovation where teachers could take risks with new instructional methods without fear of consequences. The principals recognized that sometimes creative ideas would work and sometimes not. One principal in particular stressed the importance of supporting teachers when they try something new and if it does not work, then sit down with them and figure out what happened and try again. The key was for teachers to learn from the positive and negative outcomes of the innovative ideas and keep trying new methods to help students achieve their potential. Bossert, Dwyer, Rowan, & Lee (1982) stated that school culture influences innovation and change positively when principals make sure teachers feel involved and committed. The culture of innovation included principals collaborating with teachers to provide additional opportunities during the school day for students to obtain assistance from teachers. These times set aside in the academic schedule had different names, but the concept was the same for the different buildings. Principals can utilize collaborative leadership to foster changes in internal school processes including school policies, academic learning time, instructional organization, and support for teachers and students (Hallinger & Heck, 2010). One principal approved an initiative of some teachers who wanted to help low SES students in their school. The strategy was for students to join clubs in the school. By being a member of a school club, the students would feel part of the school and student achievement would improve. This initiative was an internal school process, created and implemented collaboratively to improve student achievement and belonging.
Finally, a dichotomy appeared in the data concerning teacher instruction of content standards. This contrast revealed that some principals stressed teaching the standards to prepare for assessments and others stressed teaching skills to prepare students for the workforce and life. Those principals stressing standards, utilized strategies including providing resources, encouragement, and the Ohio Teacher Evaluation System (OTES) to ensure their teachers were teaching the standards and preparing students for the state assessments. The principals that stressed teaching skills stated that their teachers taught the standards, but they were not proponents of state testing and not particularly focused on standards and assessments. The community and their focus was on teachers instructing students with skills they can use to be successful right out of high school in the workforce and in life. Even with the dichotomy, each principal, no matter what they believed about state testing, wanted to facilitate teacher instruction.

Recommendations for Leadership. The literature clearly notes the importance of principals promoting professional development (Barrett, Cowen, Toma, & Troske, 2015; Blau & Presser; 2013; Bossert et al., 1982; Congressional Digest, 1997; Eilers and D’Amico, 2012; Hallinger, 2011; Hallinger & Wang, 2015; Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; Heise, 1994; Killion & Hirsh, 2013; Lynch, 2016; Murphy et al., 2007; Qian and Walker, 2013; Robinson et al., 2008; Schildkamp & Kuiper, 2010; Stedman, Apling & Riddle, 1993). Principals in this study did not just promote professional development, they emphasized teacher input in determining professional development. This increases shared ownership of teachers in their preparation to implement standards and prepare students for state tests. Principals in this study primarily addressed analyzing test scores to improve their processes. Murray (2014) stated that schools must use more than one data source to truly impact student achievement. Considering that five of
the six schools had poor student achievement scores, principals should utilize multiple sources of data to inform their improvement strategies. Principals should not only analyze testing data, but also analyze demographics, perception, and school processes data and develop strategies based on that analysis of the whole context of their situation.

Principals also utilized strategies to facilitate teacher instruction. Reducing distractions to learning was a primary concern for principals. Providing a building culture for teachers to focus on instruction and not behavioral issues was imperative. Additionally, principals in this study believed hiring the right teacher was the start of facilitating instruction for students. The hiring process included the candidates’ understanding of standards and instructional strategies. This concept of determining the right teacher meshes with promoting a culture of innovation in the classroom. This perspective of fostering innovation and coming alongside teachers as they work through ideas is an important element of instruction. Hiring the right teacher also meshes with the instructional dichotomy of teaching state standards. Some principals focused on teaching Ohio’s Learning Standards to prepare students for success on state assessments. Other principals stated that their teachers taught the standards, but the focus was on teaching employable and life skills for students to graduate and enter the workforce. Principals on both sides of thought regarding the focus on instruction stressed the importance of hiring the right teacher. None of the principals overtly stated the qualities they were looking for in the potential hire concerning understanding standards and instructional strategies. However, the implication was that they would be looking for teachers that fit their perspective on instruction.

**Challenges for Rural High School Principals**

An additional theme that emerged from the data analysis is the challenges rural high school principals encounter. When I asked principals about challenges they faced as rural high
school principals, I anticipated some of the following themes to emerge. However, some were more salient than others. Six sub-themes regarding the lived experiences of these rural high school principals included: close knit communities, students do not see available opportunities outside the community, low socioeconomic status (SES), lack of resources, the many hats principals wear, and their perception of state educational reforms. The sub-themes will be summarized followed by recommendations for leaders.

Principals shared the challenges and benefits of the close-knit attributes of a rural high school. Forner, Bierlein-Palmer, and Reeves’ (2012) findings in their study stated that superintendents were cognizant of their public role and viewed it as a benefit to engage in meaningful conversations in the community. Lamkin’s (2006) research of rural superintendents noted that the demands of the rural close-knit community to provide personal accountability are different from suburban and rural school districts that have layers of administrators and staff to deal with many issues. The Forner et al. (2012) and Lamkin (2006) studies were for superintendents, but the findings apply to principals, as well, because they are educational leaders facing the same issues of implementing educational reforms. The study also applies here because one of the participants in this study serves as a high school principal and a district superintendent. Principals shared that the fish bowl was a specific challenge of the close-knit community with everyone in the district watching you, knowing what you are doing, and being directly responsible to the community. This aspect of the close-knit community dictated the importance of communicating regularly and clearly. Johnson, LiBetti-Mitchel, and Rotherham’s (2014) research on federal education policy found that the school is the center of the identity for rural communities. This finding is supported in the experience shared by a principal in this study involving athletics. A principal, who served most of his career in urban schools, shared that as
long as the sports team was doing well at his current rural school, then everything at school and in the community was great. The principals who expressed that close-knit communities provided a challenge were quick to point out the benefits. One advantage was reflected in the often used term “family” when describing the feel of their community. Some family-type benefits principals shared included the aspect of just experiencing everyday life together, the feeling of safety, the outpouring of help when a member of the community faced tragedy, and that problems could more easily be solved when there is a relationship and trust with parents. A principal who had served over thirty years in urban school districts but has been in rural high schools the last seven years shared another benefit that there are things like the football team or basketball team that bonds the community together beyond education.

Another challenge principals shared was the lack of opportunities students perceived were available to them. Meece, Hutchins, Byun, Farmer, Irvin, and Weiss (2013) found that students who sought a job opportunity in the local community had lower educational aspirations and had lower ambitions for attending college because they perceived the local job did not require a higher degree. Additionally, students’ perceptions of the importance of obtaining further education after high school matched their parents’ expectations (Meece, et al., 2013). Principals in this study confirmed the research noting their concern that the lack of emphasis parents placed on education was shared by the children. Chuong and Schiess (2016) stated that rural students perceive that going to college would cause them to lose their roots in the rural community. Principals in this study were especially concerned that students with great potential would not utilize their gifts because they wanted to stay in the community or could not see opportunities that were available to them outside their small community. They recognized that these students’ primary emphasis was on getting a job as soon as they graduated, not excelling
academically. A related issue involved the lack of perceived opportunity and low achievement for students from a low SES background. This issue is notable because five of the six schools in this study faced relatively high poverty rates. Principals noted the correlation of socioeconomic background and student achievement. This coincides with the National Center for Educational Statistics (2013) and their findings that poverty level directly correlates with performance on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). Principals struggled with getting students who saw little opportunity to buy-in to the importance of learning content standards and passing state exams.

A lack of resources was another challenge noted by principals. They did not point to money as the lacking resource. The primary resource problem was attracting and hiring qualified teachers to fill some basic positions including math, science, and foreign languages. Research confirms the principals’ experience. A major challenge facing rural administrators is the difficulty recruiting and retaining quality teachers (Johnson, LiBetti-Mitchel, & Rotherham, 2014; Monk, 2007). Additionally, principals shared a dilemma of wanting to, but not being able to, offer a broader range of courses for students with higher academic abilities including Advanced Placement, College Credit Plus, and International Baccalaureate courses. Gagnon and Mattingly (2015) found that forty-seven percent of rural schools had zero students enrolled in AP courses in contrast to two percent of students in urban schools had no students enrolled in AP courses. Principals stated that this problem was caused by a lack of qualified teachers and when they did have qualified teachers, the low numbers of students made it infeasible to offer those upper level courses. These perceptions concur with Chuong and Schiess (2016) that a lack of qualified teachers combined with low numbers of students causes low AP course enrollment. These perceptions also support the research that rural schools often face shortages of qualified

Principals noted another reason for the inability to attract and hire the right teachers is the lack of industry and quality jobs for spouses in rural areas. This perception is supported by the literature that geographic isolation is a problem for rural schools to attract and retain teachers (Glover, Nugent, Chumney, Ihlo, Shapiro, Guard, Koziol, & Bovaird, 2016; U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Other resource issues included the lack of available aids for test preparation.

Principals in this study were thankful for and appreciated their local Educational Services Consortium assistance, but one principal in particular wanted an in-house curriculum coordinator. Yettick, et al. (2014) noted that rural districts faced unique obstacles as educational consortia find it difficult to serve several districts with differing needs.

A universal challenge shared by the principals was their need to wear many hats or as one principal noted, be a “jack of all trades”. Previous research supports the claim that rural administrators have a particularly unique challenge of being accountable for a wide range of responsibilities (Fishman, 2015; Forner, Bierlein-Palmer, & Reeves, 2012; Lamkin, 2006). The principals with experience in urban high schools were especially adamant about the inability to get everything done when they had so many varying obligations. One of the principals was the high school principal with no assistant and also the district superintendent. The nature of having these two positions forced him to assume many responsibilities. The principals certainly shared their frustration with educational reform, but focused more on strategies to combat the problem of having so many varied duties. Some delegated responsibilities where they could to an assistant, guidance counselors, or social workers. Others stressed the importance of being proactive, being organized, having good teachers, and keeping a positive attitude through it all as they grappled with the many hats they wear.
The salient challenge and frustration that emerged from the data analysis was the principals’ perception that their voices were not being heard by the policy makers in Columbus. The most common sentiment shared by the principals was that the educational reforms being pushed on all schools were focused on and designed for urban schools. Similarly, Johnson, LiBetti-Mitchel, and Rotherham (2014) found that many educators in rural schools believe educational reforms were designed for urban and suburban schools. Principals in this study stated that reforms based on urban districts caused problems for rural schools because their schools are different from urban schools in almost every way. They lamented that the policy makers did not understand the impact and challenges to implement the educational reforms forced upon them. The principals’ statements agree with Fishman (2015) who stated that educational reforms ignore the unique circumstances in rural school districts and force rural districts to function similarly as urban districts. Principals noted specific educational reforms including: the Ohio Teacher Evaluation System (OTES), the state report card calculations used to arrive at the grades, state assessments, gifted students, attendance, and a lack of career preparation initiatives. These issues shared by the principals in this study reflect Biddle and Azano’s (2016) finding that the push to standardize educational practices reveals the lack of understanding of policy makers regarding the differences in school contexts.

Principals also stated their concern about the lack of local decision-making for their district. They reasoned the local school board knows the local school better than anyone in Columbus. These statements regarding local control are similar to the findings of Biddle and Azano (2016) who stated that the context of the people in the school, community members, location, and local economic and social factors dictate the parameters of the local school. The frustration for the principals was that they felt little opportunity to share their concerns and they
always had to make their way to Columbus. Principals believed the policy makers in Columbus should come to them once in a while. Further, when they did share concerns about educational reforms with the policy makers, nothing of note changed for their situation. One principal, who was also the district superintendent, felt that the State Superintendent listened, but his sentiment was that educational reform would still be asserted based on the needs of urban school districts.

**Recommendations for Leadership.** Principals serving in buildings in a close-knit community must recognize and embrace the importance of relationships to help solve problems and give assistance. It is also important to initiate meaningful conversations in the many locales of the community including the grocery store, church, and barber shop. These conversations are important to establish relationships and promote the implementation strategies being used to meet the demands of the state. This will help foster a dialogue with community members to alleviate concerns of the public over state report card scores. Related to report card scores is the inability to offer upper level courses. The principals did not specifically state this problem in connection with them improving their grade on the state report card, but improving scores of gifted students factors into the state report card. This challenges the schools’ ability to improve gifted students and thereby improve the report card grade. With each school recently obtaining computers for each student in the high school, technology provides a resource to alleviate the problem and offer resources to help gifted students. A beneficial strategy could be principals collaborating with teachers, community members, and leaders in other schools to find means to utilize technology and expand course offerings. Another issue principals noted was that many students will not continue with an advanced degree or education and will enter the work force upon graduation. This issue can be addressed through collaborating with community members,
local businesses, and teachers to develop strategies to provide career readiness and life skills. Some cooperative programs exist, but rural principals must make career readiness a priority.

The salient problem for these rural principals was their frustration of not having a voice in the midst of educational reform. The value of relationships becomes important not only within the local community, but also with policy makers. Administrators must take advantage of opportunities when state policy makers provide avenues for communication. For example, the Ohio Department of Education has offered multiple opportunities for stakeholders to be involved with forming and reviewing Ohio’s Learning Standards. The state standards are currently in the review process and some will be rolled out beginning in 2017-18 school year (ODE, 2017). Additionally, the Ohio Department of Education offered the opportunity to respond and review Ohio’s strategic plan to implement the Every Student Succeeds Act in Ohio. The State Board of Education is holding eleven stakeholder meetings in counties across the state during the spring of the 2017-2018 school year. Principals must take advantage of these types of opportunities to voice concerns and establish relationships. Further, principals must establish a relationship with their state legislators and members of the state board of education. Establishing a relationship does not mean sending correspondence with complaints. They must also be proactive in communicating with state policy makers. For example, coalitions of superintendents have been established in Ohio, each organized to advocate for public education and make their voices heard at the state level. Principals and superintendents could invite their state legislators and members of the state board of education to visit the school to speak to students, to participate in a school assembly, or set up a forum to discuss education issues in the community. These methods help establish a relationship while bringing policy makers to the school. Policy makers will have
contact with students and community members and see the school. The key is to be innovative in making connection with educational policy makers in the state.

**Leadership for Learning in Rural Schools.** The principals’ role perceptions and strategies in this study supported the research on instructional leadership practices. However, with the poor student achievement scores in five of the six buildings represented by the participants, a deeper look into factors impacting student outcomes is needed. Noting the direct correlation of socioeconomic status with student test scores (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2013), there are other factors that also impact student achievement. The leadership for learning model provides an avenue for that consideration.

The leadership for learning model synthesizes transformational leadership practices with instructional leadership practices (Hallinger, 2011). The four dimensions of Hallinger’s (2011) leadership for learning model include values leadership, context for leadership, sharing leadership, and leadership focus. Values leadership is the values, beliefs, knowledge, and experience that influences the disposition of the leader. Context for leadership is the societal culture, staff and community characteristics, institutional system, and school organization. Sharing leadership is the collaboration among the principal, teachers, and other stakeholders in the community. Leadership focus is the vision and goals, academic structure and processes, and people capacity. The dimension that directly impacts student outcomes is the leadership focus dimension. Hallinger (2011) distinctly stated that principals do not have direct impact on student outcomes, but they do have direct impact on vision and goals, academic structure and processes, and people capacity. Therefore, the leadership focus dimension is the portion of the model that requires a closer look.
Data analysis in the present study revealed that principals attended well to the constant and imminent factors of academic structures and processes of the dimension. The data also revealed that the principals promoted the vision and goals portion of the leadership focus. However, the vision and goals were short term and primarily focused on the needs of the current school year. For example, from their data analysis of student test scores, writing across the curriculum was a prominent need. Principals worked collaboratively to develop instructional strategies to improve writing and thus improve student test scores. Short term goals are important and necessary. However, a plan to develop or share long term goals was missing in the data. It is difficult to see past the immediate issues, but principals must promote long term learning focused goals to help guide the teachers and students through educational reforms (Hallinger, 2011; Louis, et al., 2010). The third portion of the leadership focus dimension is people capacity. Data analysis showed that the principals promoted teacher input to provide the most beneficial professional development to increase their peoples’ capacity. In a similar vein with people capacity, principals noted a difficulty recruiting and retaining qualified teachers. They also lamented the inability to offer advanced courses due to lack of qualified teachers. Principals addressed people capacity with focused attention on professional development, but the data did not reveal any strategies utilized to tackle the need for qualified teachers. An appropriate strategy to recruit and retain qualified teachers to fill needed positions and offer advanced courses would be to find or develop a systemized plan for recruitment, selection, and retention of qualified teachers.

Data also revealed a sense that many of these rural schools wanted to remain the same and embraced their rural identity with the school being the center of the community. Additionally, data showed some principals were not especially concerned with their poor student
achievement scores, but did care about their students’ readiness to enter a career field upon graduation. Other principals were concerned with their students’ test scores. All principals wanted their students to be successful and productive members of society upon graduation whether it be obtaining additional education, an advanced degree, or entering the workforce. The focus on student achievement points to the importance in student outcomes and the low student achievement scores of five of the six schools. Two of the three elements in Hallinger’s model that directly impact student outcomes were not being fully or directly addressed. This lack of attention to the whole dimension does not help student achievement scores to improve and may be complicit in low student achievement scores on the report card. Therefore, principals’ thorough attention to the entire aspect of vision and goals, academic structures and processes, and people capacity is imperative.

**Recommendations for Further Research**

This study shared the lived experiences of six principals in rural high schools in Northwest Ohio. They revealed their role perceptions and strategies to implement educational reforms in Ohio. To provide more narrowed focus of participants, this study used high school principals from rural schools. Research on rural high school principals is lacking. Studies of rural superintendents is not wide spread for the current educational reform period, but some research exists (see, e.g., Forner et al., 2012; Lamkin, 2006). A recommendation for further research is to replicate this study for rural high school principals in other states to corroborate the conclusions of this study and expand knowledge of the ways rural high school principals implement educational reforms.

Another recommendation is to replicate this study in suburban and urban schools in Northwest Ohio to determine role perceptions and strategies used in those two differing school
settings. I speculate that principals in all typologies have common role perceptions of building relationships and distributed leadership, employ similar strategies, and share similar frustrations with changing standards and assessments as they attempt to implement educational reforms. Additionally, I surmise that some differences exist with the amount of leverage urban and suburban districts hold politically and resources they receive. Further, I am certain that urban and suburban districts have more administrative support so that principals in those districts do not have to wear as many hats. A comparison of principals’ role perceptions and strategies between the typologies would be beneficial to ascertain commonalities and differences between the principals.

Principals in the study claim that they have good teachers who teach the standards. However, five of six student achievement scores were poor. There appears to be a disconnect with the principals’ claims and reality. A recommendation to advance the research of this study would be to include teachers from the same districts as the principals. Teachers’ input could validate or dispel the perception of principals and how they implement education reforms. Adding teachers’ input could shine light on the apparent disconnect and lead to improved student achievement. Additionally, further research could study the assessments to determine if principals’ frustration should be targeted at the assessments or should be focused in another direction. This study may uncover principals’ valid criticism of the student assessments, changes needed in teacher instruction, an essential building culture change, a combination of these factors, or something else entirely.

All of the principals in this study spoke of ways they were attempting to conquer educational reform issues in their respective buildings, but frustration with the educational reforms were clearly evident. A recommendation for further research would include studies on
educational reform focusing on reform fatigue, reform survival, and reform strategy for administrators and teachers. I suspect that all three of these elements are impacting teachers and principals in a negative manner that ultimately could be detrimental to students. Reform fatigue may cause high turnover rates or may cause teachers and principals to give up trying. Reform survival may cause teachers and principals go in their bunkers [rooms and offices] to just ride out the latest educational changes. Reform strategy findings may uncover new strategies to overcome reform fatigue and move teachers and principals beyond mere survival of educational reforms. Discovering the effects reform fatigue, reform survival, and reform strategy may have on principals and teachers could be beneficial to determine the potential and eventual impact on student achievement.

**Conclusion**

This phenomenological study of the lived experiences of rural high school principals in Northwest Ohio revealed the role perceptions and strategies used to implement educational reforms. Principals utilized instructional leadership practices including distributed leadership qualities and built relationships to facilitate teacher preparation and instruction. Instructional leadership practices are vital due to the increased emphasis on accountability and the need to proficiently implement reforms to improve student achievement at the building level (Alvoid & Black, 2014). Change inherently brings uncertainty and challenges. The principals in the present study shared frustration with implementing educational reforms due to the constant changes in curriculum and assessments. They also shared frustration with their lack of voice in the discussions and decision-making by policy makers. At the same time, however, they stressed the importance of not complaining. They focused on solutions to the issues that confronted them as they led their buildings through the maze of educational reform to improve student achievement.
Principals must work on building relationships with policy makers to arrive at workable solutions to problems that inevitably arise when changes occur. They must not get caught up in negative political wrangling about educational reform, but propose positive solutions to problems. The primary focus must always remain on students. Therefore, it is imperative that principals maintain a positive outlook for the good of their students.

The principals encountered characteristics of small rural high schools that help them focus on students. Characteristics include being close-knit, being a small population, and wearing many hats. These characteristics of rural communities provide an optimal situation for principals to maintain a close connection to parents, members of the community, and students. The principals in this study noted that the primary reason they worked at their job was that they cared for students and teachers. Their situation affords principals the opportunity to express care personally to every student and teacher in the building. Maintaining a positive attitude, utilizing proven instructional leadership practices, and caring for others is a combination of qualities that will help principals successfully lead their buildings through the maze of educational reform.
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APPENDIX A. INFORMED CONSENT LETTER

Informed Consent for Principals

I am, Jesse Hotmaire, a researcher as a doctoral candidate at Bowling Green State University in the Educational Leadership doctoral program in the School of Educational Foundations, Leadership and Policy. My advisor is Dr. Patrick D. Pauken. This qualitative study is being conducted to describe the role perception and leadership strategies principals use to implement educational reforms in rural school districts in Northwest Ohio. You are being contacted to participate in this study because you are a principal of a high school in a rural school district in Northwest Ohio.

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to investigate principals’ perceived roles as instructional leaders and the leadership strategies principals use to promote values and school culture, collaboration, professional development, risk taking, and feedback as they implement current educational reforms in Northwest Ohio’s secondary schools. Principals must contend with the complexity of the changes thrust upon them. It is important to note that this study is not an attempt to place a value judgment on standardized curriculum and assessment reforms such as No Child Left Behind, the Common Core State Standards, or Every Student Succeeds Act. Additionally, this study is not an attempt to place a value judgment on any school district, building, or educational leader. There are no direct benefits to participants such as monetary awards or course credit. However, this study will serve as a guide to assist educational leaders and principals in particular as they implement twenty-first century educational reforms. The Ohio Department of Education is currently drafting a response to Every Student Succeeds Act focusing on academic content standards, standardized assessments, accountability, school improvement, teacher evaluation, and closing the achievement gap for vulnerable students. Therefore, understanding the role perception of principals and strategies principals utilize in their buildings to implement these areas of focus is vital.

The procedures of the study will include collecting data from interviews, observations, and artifacts. Interviews will consist of two one-on-one interviews, each lasting forty-five minutes. While on site for the interviews, the researcher will request artifacts including meeting agendas, teacher professional development offerings, and demographic data. While on site for the second interview, the researcher requests to spend time unobtrusively observing the workings of the building.

Your participation is completely voluntary. You are free to withdraw at any time. You may decide to skip questions or discontinue participation at any time without penalty. Deciding to participate or not will not affect your job, school, district, your relationship with Bowling Green State University or any other institution involved in this research. Additionally, your district superintendent has granted permission for me to contact you regarding your potential participation in this study.

All data collected in the course of this study will be stored on a password protected computer and only accessible by the researcher to maintain confidentiality. The data will be kept for a minimum of seven years. The signed consent forms reporting your name or any other identifying information will be stored separately. A coding strategy will be used to link themes that emerge from the interviews, artifacts, and observation notes.
Consent will be indicated upon the participant responding to researcher questions.
For the purpose of recordkeeping, the principle Investigator will document the date and the time of individual face to face interviews.

For the interview:
“Thank you for agreeing to speak with me today.”

“Let us take a few moments to review the consent document. Let me know if you have any questions.”

“The purpose of this interview is to obtain your feedback regarding high school principals’ role expectations and implementation of educational reforms. The purpose of my study is to discover the lived experiences of high school principals as they negotiate the educational reforms in Ohio and guide their buildings through the changes.”

“Educational leaders, like you, have meaningful information, that when shared will be invaluable in obtaining understanding regarding the role expectations and strategies you use when leading your high school building through educational reforms”.

For participants:
“I remind you that to protect the privacy of participants, all transcripts will be coded with pseudonyms and I ask that you not discuss what is discussed in the interview with anyone”.

“The interview will last no longer than 45 minutes and will be audio recorded to make sure that our discussion is documented accurately. You will have the opportunity to review your individual responses to review for accuracy”.

“Do you have any questions before we begin?”
Round 1: Interview Questions (semi-structured)

1) What values, beliefs, and experiences (lessons learned) have shaped your philosophy in leading / guiding your staff through the changes in Ohio’s Learning Standards and assessments?

2) How do you promote your vision and goals to the teachers and staff in your building? Especially concerning your response to changes with Ohio’s Learning Standards and assessments. Can you tell me about a time when this went really well / badly?

3) How do you go about preparing your building (students and staff) for teaching and learning Ohio’s Learning Standards? When testing comes, how do you prepare for it?

4) How do you navigate staff composition (makeup) and the external dynamics from stakeholders (community, school board, and societal pressure) in your decision making? Could you give me a couple examples?
5) In what ways do you elicit staff input when addressing the demands of changes to Ohio’s Learning Standards and assessments?

6) In what ways do you promote and utilize professional development for teachers / staff to prepare them for Ohio’s new standards and assessments? Does staff have any input in PD?

7) Can you tell me about a time when a change you tried to implement went really well and a time when a change went badly?

8) What particular challenges do you experience as a principal of a rural high school in this time of changing standards and assessments?
APPENDIX C. SECOND INTERVIEW SCRIPT AND QUESTIONS

(Participant Name)

Consent will be indicated upon the participant responding to researcher questions. For the purpose of recordkeeping, the principle Investigator will document the date and the time of individual face to face interviews.

For the interview:
“Thank you for agreeing to speak with me again.”

“Do you need to review the consent document? Let me know if you have any questions.”

“I want to give a reminder of the purpose of my study. To discover the lived experiences of high school principals as they negotiate the educational reforms in Ohio and guide their buildings through the changes. Specifically, I am seeking information about high school principals’ role expectations and implementation of educational reforms.”

“You have provided meaningful information. I would like to obtain clarification regarding your feedback from the first interview.”

For participants:
“I wanted to remind you that to protect the privacy of participants, all transcripts will be coded with pseudonyms and I ask that you not discuss what is discussed in the interview with anyone”.

“The interview will last no longer than 45 minutes and will be audio recorded to make sure that our discussion is documented accurately. You will have the opportunity to review your individual responses to review for accuracy”.

“Do you have any questions before we begin?”
**Round 2: Interview Questions (semi-structured)**

1) You talked about your values and beliefs (your philosophy) at our last interview. What experience gave you knowledge that has had the greatest impact on your leadership philosophy?

2) In what way(s) has that impacted the strategies you use to guide your building (staff and students) through the maze of Ohio’s content standards and assessments?

3) What do you feel is the best way for you, the principal, to impact students’ assessment scores (student outcomes)? How do you go about it?

4) In our last interview, I asked about navigating staff composition and external forces. I would like to stay with the same concept with this question, but with a different focus. In what ways do you see external forces (society/culture, the community, the school board) impacting you and your building specific to teaching content standards and passing assessments?
5) What or who do you think has the greatest impact on students’ achievement on state assessments? (Principals and Teachers – the school / community and family)

6) In our last interview, I asked about challenges rural schools face. I would like to follow up that question. In what way(s) do you address these challenges to successfully navigate teachers teaching Ohio’s learning standards and students passing state assessments?

7) If you had the power, what is one thing you would do to improve that issue for rural schools?