Perceptions of Georgia Elementary School Principals in Relation to Education Reform and the A+ Education Reform Act of 2000

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PERCEPTIONS OF GEORGIA ELEMENTARY PRINCIPALS
IN RELATION TO EDUCATION REFORM AND THE
A+ EDUCATION REFORM ACT OF 2000

by

DORIS ELIZABETH CANDLER NEWTON

Under the Direction of Professor James Burnham

ABSTRACT

During the study, the researcher investigated the role perceptions of Georgia elementary school principals after the implementation of A+ Education Reform Act of 2000. Principals are being held accountable for making significant changes within their schools. The reform movement may make the principal’s job more demanding since new responsibilities have been added and few or none have been taken away. Demands that are now being placed on principals are such that few people are willing to step up and take on those responsibilities. Principals, as building administrators, have firsthand knowledge of the positive and negative impacts A+ Education Reform Act of 2000 has had on the effectiveness of the school and should be given the opportunity to express this information in the midst of education reform. A descriptive research study was developed to gather data from Georgia elementary principals across the state. From those surveyed, 187 responded to the survey. The researcher addressed role perceptions on both general and specific components of the A+ Education Reform Act of 2000. The researcher gathered both qualitative and quantitative data. The results from this study clearly showed that principals have a strong
understanding of the A+ Education Reform Act of 2000 as it pertains to their roles as building administrators as well as possession of skills needed to handle conflict with different stakeholders. Of the eleven components studied, three components reported to be “very valuable” with four more components proved to be “valuable”. Four components were reported to be of “little or no value”. The researcher’s findings strengthened data previously gathered in a recent study to impact policy makers and educators for planning, implementing and changing present and future educational reform.

INDEX WORDS: Dissertation, Education Reform, Elementary Principals, A+ Education Reform Act of 2000, NCLB, Georgia
PERCEPTIONS OF GEORGIA ELEMENTARY PRINCIPALS IN RELATION TO EDUCATION REFORM AND THE A+ EDUCATION REFORM ACT OF 2000

by

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A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of Georgia Southern University in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

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PERCEPTIONS OF GEORGIA ELEMENTARY PRINCIPALS
IN RELATION TO EDUCATION REFORM AND THE
A+ EDUCATION REFORM ACT OF 2000

by

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December 2005
DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the beloved memory of both my father and mother whose love and determination have motivated me to complete this project. My parents were both hardworking and of strong Christian values, which taught me to find my purpose, to seek God’s will, to set high goals and be committed to meeting them. I wish they were here to see me graduate, as they were the first time I received my diploma from Georgia Southern but I know they will be watching over me.

To my husband, Joe, whose unconditional love, support, never ending patience and assistance have carried me through the late nights, long weekends and summers filled with classes, writing and reading. You were always there to do whatever was necessary to help me to complete this degree.

To my children, Trey, Alex and Taylor, you have been my inspiration to get this finished so I could spend more time with each of you. You were there with words of encouragement that helped me through those days when I wanted to give up. I am now ready to be a more “normal” and even better mom. Thanks to all of you.
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them in envelopes. To those close to me, willing to stamp the envelopes and mail
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closer to finishing. I could not have completed this without you.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Accountability is not a new idea to educators, but has moved to center stage with many education reform movements across the country (Cornett & Gaines, 1997). Accountability raises the question of who should give an account of his/her actions and shows responsibility for the educational process and is never far removed from questions concerning control and power (Scott, 1994). While accountability is well publicized, it is not always clear who should be accountable for what and to whom, how they will be judged and who should make the decisions (Olson, 1998). Academic standards are applied to all students in a particular school or system. The students are assessed on the standards, and compared with other students in other schools and other systems (Sheldon & Biddle, 1998). Changes may then take place according to the data collected from the assessments along with promise of rewards for successes and threat of sanctions for failures to reach prescribed standards (Sheldon & Biddle).

Background Information

Approaches to accountability build on twenty to thirty years of searching for and initiating the best policies to promote and ensure student success (Cornett & Gaines, 1997). In the past, personal knowledge and first hand experience, community satisfaction, and a responsive principal were enough to convince most that schools were satisfactory (Brenauer & Cress, 1997). Current accountability mandates require that states have systems collect, report, and use objective data on student and school performance indicators or standards that
represent what and how much students have learned (Brenauer & Cress). In recent years there has been increasing pressure from policy makers and the public to show results in student achievement (Watts, 2000). Calls for tough, academic standards, more use of national tests and greater accountability, backed by strong “rewards” or “sanctions”, are frequently heard in current debates about educational reform (Sheldon & Biddle, 1998).

During the 1970s, accountability movements were focused on whether there were enough teachers and classroom space and current textbooks (Cornett & Gaines, 1997). The general view was that education was in good shape if a “reasonable” number of high school graduates went on to college.

Accountability shifted its attention during the 1980s to the skills and knowledge of teachers and principals. States began to revamp certification processes and set minimal levels for receiving licenses as well as improving evaluations for teachers and principals. In the 1990s, more changes were becoming evident when policies began to emerge reflecting an era of tighter budgets, less tolerance for bureaucratic controls and greater emphasis on front-line authority and responsibility (Cornett & Gaines).

Starting with the publication in 1983 of A Nation At Risk, a cascade of reports has fueled the popular perception that the U.S. education system is in crisis (Haertel, 1999). Schools have been charged with failing to meet the changing needs of all students (Christenson, 1993). Advocates in favor of school reform questioned the academic preparation that students received in America’s schools (Holbein, 1998). State policy makers moved to rewarding success and
punishing failure in an attempt to ensure that students received a high-quality education and that tax dollars were used wisely (Olson, 1999). Two Presidential administrations have also responded to the public’s demand for accountability in education by offering incentives and support to states that develop academic standards (Holbein, 1998). Schools have begun to make more data-driven decisions than ever before (Olson).

Each state has its own system of accountability and uses a variety of accountability tools, including school report cards, effectiveness scores, and school rankings (Gullantt & Ritter, 2002). In addition to test scores, states may also take into consideration graduation and dropout rates, class size and teacher qualifications. (Guillantt & Ritter). Progress at the state and local levels is uneven. Systems are at different points in development and some are more complicated than reformers expected them to be (Olson, 1999). Even though development is uneven, a few similarities hold true: (1) most states rely heavily on test scores to determine rewards and sanctions; (2) most rewards and sanctions are focused primarily on student performance; (3) states have identified low performing schools; (4) few states are ready or willing to impose penalties (Olson).

Principal’s Role

The call for reform in education has had impact on the role of school principals (Richardson, Flanigan, & Prickett, 1991). Effective school leadership is a necessary piece in successful school reform (Groff, 2001). The principalship is a complex role, one that is molded by numerous factors – both educational and
non-educational (Beck & Murphy, 1993). Principals are often left in the middle, trying to reconcile state and district mandates with local stakeholders (Lashway, 2000). Principals are now commonly portrayed as a critical factor in school level reform (Copeland, 2001). Superintendents, school boards, parents, community members and policy makers hold them accountable. The principal is relied upon to ensure the learning of every pupil in a diverse population, while fostering the professional growth of the faculty to increase success (Copeland).

The traditional role of the principal seems to be shifting relative to the changes and school-wide reforms that are taking place in schools. Principals are often struggling to redefine their leadership role (Murphy, 1994). Principals may need to adjust to the new and sometimes difficult demands of the expanded responsibilities and roles. Principals have to develop new working relationships and models of communications within the school community (Naftchi-Ardebili, Mueller, Vallina & Warwick, 1992).

Given the level of expectations placed on schools and principals, the diversity of stakeholders with whom they must work and the complexity of schooling, serving as principal is a demanding and stressful role (Hausman, Crow, & Sperry, 2000). The tensions of the principal’s leadership role have always been there but it is the extent and intensity of the tensions that have grown (Fullan, 1997). The principal must strive to meet the needs and demands of the organization (Terry, 1996).

Without capable leadership, the school will likely not be as effective (Barth, 1990). Repeated calls to reform emphasize the need for change at the
local and building level with the principal’s leadership role being highlighted (Zheng, 1996). School improvements cannot be achieved without the support and participation of principals (Zheng). School reform will not take place if the principal is not part of the process (Tirozzi, 2000).

Principal Shortage

With the pool of applicants for principals growing smaller, principals have reported that the high level of stress, time demands, broadening job requirements that exceed salaries, and new state accountability make retirement appealing (Kerrins, 2001). The stress that principals face has increased along with number and variety of problems (Barth, 1990). A once stable profession is now facing unprecedented turnover. More disturbing is that the most effective principals may be the ones most likely to leave their jobs (Barth).

Vincent Ferrandino, executive director of the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) states that few individuals are willing to “step up to the plate” and take on the responsibilities of being a principal especially in light of current mandated reform (Education USA, p.12). Students across the nation returned to schools in 2000 without full-time principals (Groff, 2001). Students from 163 schools in New York City began the school year with a temporary principal. These schools had to begin the year with temporary principals due to either retirement or resignation adding attending schools with no leadership to the numerous challenges students already face (Groff).

The NAESP revealed in a recent study that the principalship is more demanding than it used to be (Ferrandino, 2001). The researchers also noted a
growing shortage of elementary school principals. The attrition rate stands at 42% for the decade from 1988 to 1998 and is expected to remain at least as high into the next decade. The United States Department of Labor estimates that the need for principals will grow with rising school enrollments through 2005 (Ferrandino).

Principals are public symbols for schools (Richardson, Flanigan, & Prickett, 1991). Principals are the most responsible for seeing that policies are carried out within schools but are not always consulted on the formulation of those policies that most affect the school organization (Richardson et al.). Role overload and role ambiguity along with the feeling of the principalship no longer being a concrete role can lead to increased stress for principals involved with fundamental change efforts (Leithwood, Jantzi, & Dart, 1992). Accountability is not just a task added to the already difficult list of a principal’s responsibilities (Lashway, 2000). It requires new roles and new forms of leadership carried out under public analysis while concurrently trying to maintain the day-to-day management of the school (Lashway).

Education Reform Movements

“Accountability for student learning is impossible without a clear, focused road map of what and how well students are to learn from kindergarten through graduation” (Watts, 2000, p. 3). Standards, assessments and accountability are tightening around academic performance (Pipho, 1999). “Quality Counts”, an annual report published by Education Week reported that 48 states are using statewide assessments, 36 states are issuing report cards, 19 states are rating
schools on their performance, 19 states are giving assistance to low-performing schools, 16 states are imposing sanctions on chronically failing schools, and 14 states are giving monetary rewards to high-performing schools (Pipho).

Texas and Kentucky are frequently referred to as models for accountability (Davie & Silva, 1999). Texas has developed a system that includes content standards, multiple measures, a focus on reading in the early grades, along with rewards and sanctions. The system evolved after the adoption and implementation of standards and assessments aligned with the standards. Texas reports steady improvement in its schools (Davie & Silva). Kentucky changed its expectations for the outcomes of 12 years of formal schooling as well as what will be assessed to increase stakes for success. The Kentucky legislature created high stakes assessment and accountability that included pay raises for teachers, increased spending on technology, free preschool for low-income children and statewide assessment (Foster, 1991).

Georgia’s Reform Movement

With the passing of House Bill 1187 (HB 1187), Georgia educators began to implement the road map known as A+ Education Reform Act of 2000 on July 1, 2000. Reforms to improve the education of Georgia’s students have been mandated by state policy makers, which in turn affected the roles and responsibilities of Georgia’s principals (Wright, 2001).

Provisions within the A+ Education Reform Act of 2000 include increased accountability through assessment of students (Code Section 20-2-281), assignment of school ratings, development of school report cards to determine
rewards and sanctions (Code Section 20-14-33, 20-14-34, 20-14-38, 20-14-39, 20-14-41), establishment of school councils (Code Section 20-2-85, 20-2-86), reviewing and restructuring programs (Code Section 20-2-153, 20-2-154). These provisions within the A+ Education Reform Act of 2000 have required school leaders at every level to re-think the most effective way to educate students under the new reform legislation.

To date, only one study has been conducted that researched Georgia elementary principals’ role transformations as a result of the initiatives described in the A+ Education Reform Act of 2000. Wright (2001) conducted a statewide study on elementary principals’ role changes in the initial implementation phase of Georgia’s reform mandates.

Statement of Problem

Accountability has become a tough, even hostile, word in the vocabulary of education. It may not be popular, but educational accountability is a household word that is not going away. Accountability focuses on important questions about teaching and learning in our schools. Policy makers are committing billions of federal dollars towards educational reform and states are following close behind. States and districts rush to hold schools, principals and teachers accountable for student performance. The use of academic standards, wider use of testing and greater accountability backed by strong rewards and sanctions are frequently seen throughout the research concerning educational reform. Researchers have also shown that the role of the elementary principal is a crucial element to a productive, successful school while being involved with
educational reform. Leadership from the elementary principal is a critical factor in determining whether a school moves forward to improve student achievement or remains stagnant. Researchers have demonstrated over time that successful implementation of change requires strong leadership. Research data state that principals’ perceptions of change and mandated reform relate to successful reform implementation.

With the implementation of the A+ Education Reform Act of 2000, Georgia educators began to implement laws drafted to improve the academic performance of students. The role of the elementary principal had to take into consideration the new roles and responsibilities of the reform. A small amount of data in which researchers studied principals’ perceptions of their roles has been found with a smaller amount of data of perceptions in relation to comprehensive educational reform. More research was needed to define a better understanding of the perceptions of elementary principals regarding their roles after implementation of a comprehensive education reform act.

Therefore, the researcher’s purpose was to investigate the perceptions of Georgia elementary school principals in relation to A+ Education Reform Act of 2000. The researcher explored perceptions of Georgia elementary school principals after implementing mandated educational reform to complement the small amount of existing research on principals’ perceptions as a result of reform. The researcher replicated the research study conducted by Wright (2001) in order to further the data in relation to principal’s perceptions during a state mandated reform to benefit educators and policy makers in that several sections
of the A+ Education Reform Act of 2000 have been implemented periodically over the past four years and affect a principal’s roles differently.

Significance of the Study

Through the accountability movement, the public is now demanding a higher level of education for its students. Schools are being pressed to verify results of student learning by holding districts, schools, principals, teachers and students more accountable for student performance. Policy makers are putting more federal and state money into educational reform and are demanding positive results or outcomes.

Principals are one of the parties that may be greatly impacted by educational reform. Principals are being held accountable in making significant changes within their schools. They may become a force for dramatic school improvement. The reform movement may make the principal’s job more demanding since new responsibilities are now being added and few or none are being taken away. Demands that are being placed on principals are such that few people are willing to step up and take on those responsibilities. More research is needed as to how or if the role perceptions of principals have changed and how added responsibilities are perceived and carried out from the principal’s perspective. This may not only clarify problems that may come with the reform movement itself but also have an impact on the concerns that researchers have shown in relation to the rising shortage of principals.
Policy makers declare that more money is now being spent on the educational system so the problem with education may not lie with the lack of resources but with the lack of wisdom on the part of those within the system itself - the students, teachers and/or administrators. Policy makers need input from the educators involved with implementing mandated policies to ensure that changes can be made to better assist with academic improvement.

The researcher has been involved in administration since the onset of the A+ Education Reform Act of 2000. More demands are being placed on the researcher's leadership roles in relation to mandates from the reform movement in Georgia. Changes have been necessary to ensure student achievement. Acknowledging what research states, the single most critical factor in creating and maintaining high performing schools is the leadership of the principal, to investigate the principal's role perceptions while being involved in mandated reform across the state of Georgia is imperative.

A study was recently done on the A+ Education Reform Act of 2000 and the researcher stated that role perceptions of the principals surveyed had not changed but had expanded due to the obligations now held as building administrators. More research was needed on A+ Education Reform Act of 2000 and principals' perceptions on mandated education reform to strengthen and extend the existing data. More research may also broaden understanding towards the effects that mandated reform has on principals. Principals, as building administrators, have firsthand knowledge of the positive and negative impacts A+ Education Reform Act of 2000 has had on the effectiveness of the
school and should be given the opportunity to express this information in the midst of comprehensive education reform.

Research Questions

The overarching question for this study: Has the implementation of A+ Education Reform Act of 2000 effected the role perceptions of Georgia elementary school principals? The researcher addressed the following research questions during the study:

1. What are the present perceptions of Georgia elementary principals’ since the full implementation of A+ Education Reform Act of 2000?
2. Have Georgia elementary principals’ changed their roles based on their perceptions of A+ Education Reform Act of 2000 from 2002 - 2004?
3. Do Georgia elementary principals’ perceptions of the A+ Education Reform Act of 2000 vary by age, gender, level of education, length of service, or geographical location of the school?

Procedures

In setting up the research study, the researcher investigated the most effective procedures to use to answer the research questions. The researcher used both qualitative and quantitative methods.

Research Design

A descriptive research design addressed the research questions stated in the research question section. A survey from a previous study concerning the implementation of A+ Education Reform Act of 2000 throughout Georgia was used to gather the baseline data (see Appendix A). The researcher gathered
additional data since the time the survey was originally used. The researcher further determined the elementary school principal's perceptions affected by A+ Education Reform Act of 2000, and further explored differences among the principals that responded. The researcher did not collect data concerning support principals receive from the district as collected during the first study but this did not affect the comparison of data or the researcher’s ability to answer the research questions for this study. The researcher also modified the survey by removing components of A+ legislation that were no longer part of the reform act.

Population

The researcher used population from the current 180 school districts in the state of Georgia. The researcher gathered information from elementary school principals within these 180 school districts. The researcher included only elementary schools that housed pre-kindergarten through fifth grade and/or kindergarten through fifth grade. The current population of 1,225 elementary schools was used as reported from the Georgia Department of Education (Georgia Department of Education, 2002).

Sample

The researcher used random sampling techniques to gain a representative sample of the population (de Vaus, 2001). A single stage sampling process was used due to the availability of names of elementary school principals using the Georgia Public Education Directory (Georgia Department of Education, 2002). The survey was sent to a random sample of elementary school principals throughout the state of Georgia, including participants from all
varieties of geographic and economic locations within the state (Creswell, 1994). This procedure enabled the researcher to generalize the findings from the study to the entire population (Creswell, 1994; Glesne, 1999). Special entities (e.g. specialty schools, psychoeducational programs, alternative schools, etc.) that were listed in the directory were not included in this study.

A systematic sampling system was used to select the subjects from the elementary population in the state of Georgia (Gay, 1995; Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996). From the current population of 1,225 elementary school principals, 400 principals were included in this study. This number was higher than the recommended sample size of approximately 300 for a total population size of over 1200 (Smith, 1980). Accompanying the survey was a cover letter stating the purpose of the survey so the participants would see the importance and need for their responses. The cover letter also clarified the procedures that were needed to complete the survey.

Instrumentation

A survey developed by Wright (2001) and used in a prior research study on elementary school principals’ role perceptions during the implementation of the A+ Education Reform Act of 2000 was replicated for this research study (see Appendix A). The revised survey (see Appendix B) included quantitative and qualitative questions to gain a thorough understanding of principal’s perceptions as they implemented components of the mandated reform. Survey questions addressed specific components of A+ Education Reform Act of 2000 and explored perceptions of elementary principals as a result of the new reform laws.
The survey had both face validity and content validity (Wright, 2001). A panel of experts reviewed the questionnaire to ensure face validity during the previous study (Creswell, 1994). Content validity of the instrument was also achieved by conducting a pilot survey on a selected group of Georgia elementary school principals (Wright, 2001).

The survey included basic demographic information and questions developed using a Likert scale, along with open-ended questions on particular aspects of the reform, which were coded to allow the researcher to discover more personal reactions to the implementation process. The data gathered from the questions helped to ascertain principals’ perceptions as to the effectiveness of implementation. The data also allowed the researcher to compare demographic variables that might affect responses to the questions. The responses to the open-ended questions helped the researcher clarify role perceptions of Georgia elementary principals in relation to education reform and A+ Education Reform Act of 2000.

Data Collection

The randomly selected principals were mailed the survey instrument along with a cover letter along and a self-addressed stamped envelope. A random number was printed on the front of each envelope. The number corresponded with a name on the list of selected principals. This number ensured the researcher the identity of the participants so contact could be made if necessary. A follow-up postcard requesting a reply to the survey was mailed to participants not responding. A second mailing of the survey and cover letter was sent to
those not responding to help influence a higher number of respondents. The researcher guaranteed confidentiality of all information gathered through the survey process and that coding would be destroyed upon completion of the dissertation process.

**Data Analysis**

Both quantitative and qualitative research methodologies were used to analyze the data received. Descriptive statistics were gathered on questions one through six on the survey and were used to summarize the patterns from the sample of elementary school principals in Georgia (de Vaus, 2001). Upon receiving surveys from participants, a statistical analysis was done on the survey questions. The Statistical Program for the Social Sciences computer program (SPSS, 2001) that completes statistical analysis was used for quantitative analysis to determine mean and standard deviation. The researcher also developed coding of the open-ended questions to investigate the perceptions of various aspects of the A+ Education Reform Act of 2000.

The research questions were addressed in this study by the survey items using the Likert scale. The principals’ general perceptions scale included a four-point scale that ranged from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The principals’ perceptions scale on specific components of A+ Education Reform Act of 2000 ranged from very valuable to no value. SPSS (SPSS, 2001) was used to analyze the data quantitatively.

Descriptive data were gathered from questions one through six on the survey and considered as predictor variables. Descriptive statistics for
elementary principals including frequencies, means and standard deviations were developed using SPSS (SPSS, 2001). Demographic variables (gender, age, length of service, projected length of service, educational level, school location) and selected mandated reform components were analyzed using the correlations from SPSS (SPSS, 2001). In an effort to study the data in order to reveal whether differences among responding principals exist, the researcher used a one-way ANOVA method to confirm or deny the degree of differences among the principals (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996). This analysis enabled the researcher to determine how specific groups of elementary principals answered and to determine if relationships were found among these groups (de Vaus, 2001).

Open-ended questions were analyzed qualitatively to provide the researcher with information concerning the process of implementation during a mandated reform and the experience from the principals’ perspective (Creswell, 1994). The researcher developed coding of the responses to the open-ended questions. The researcher analyzed the responses for patterns and themes. A third party expert verified the patterns gathered from the data. This helped make the researcher’s work “more accurate, faster, and more thorough” (Glesne, 1999, p. 146). Combining both quantitative and qualitative data, the researcher was able to better study the perceptions of elementary principals during educational reform (Creswell, 1994).
Limitations

1. Reform perceptions may differ among middle and high school principals and elementary principals in Georgia due to differences in application of reform components.
2. Permission to secure surveys was necessary for several districts within the state of Georgia.
3. Data from a previous study was being used as baseline data to compare new data from this study for changes in elementary principals' perceptions after implementing A+ Education Reform Act of 2000.
4. The survey was designed and used in a previous study.

Delimitations

1. Middle and high school principals were excluded from this study.
2. Generalizations of study were limited specifically to Georgia elementary school principals.

Definition of Terms

1. A+ Education Reform Act of 2000 is a comprehensive educational reform document submitted by Governor Roy Barnes and signed into law on April 25, 2000.
2. Elementary school is a school that may contain grades prekindergarten, kindergarten, first, second, third, fourth and/or fifth. A number of districts have a K-6 or K-8 category in the elementary school division. A small number of schools house K-12 in the same facility.
3. **Georgia Elementary School Principals** are individuals serving as the head administrator of the elementary schools in the 180 school districts throughout the state.

4. **Local School Councils** are groups established by legislative, district or local mandate to involve a mixture of stakeholders in making school decisions. The councils usually consist of the school principal, parents or guardians of students attending the school, teachers, and if mandated, members of local community. The **A+ Education Reform Act of 2000** has mandated the formation of school councils as advisory bodies to provide recommendations to principals. The council will include the principal, two teachers who do not have children attending the school, two parents or guardians of students enrolled in the school and two business partners. All members will be elected to serve 2-year terms. Parents and teachers will be elected from the parent and teacher population by the parents and teachers.

5. **No Child Left Behind (NCLB)** is the federally mandated reform led by President George W. Bush and signed into law in January of 2002. The principles of NCLB are accountability of states, school districts, and schools; greater choice for parents and students; more flexibility for states and local systems in the use of Federal education dollars; and a stronger emphasis on reading.
6. **Reforms** are those tactical changes developed to improve school performance. Innovations have been developed and implemented to resolve school problems.

**Summary**

Even though researchers have data showing states are handling accountability in different ways, accountability systems appear to be here to stay. While the procedures may be different, the goal of any state accountability systems is still the same: to improve schools and increase achievement for all students. With the implementation of A+ Education Reform Act of 2000, Georgia educators were directed to implement laws established to increase student achievement.

School reform continues to evolve with changing curriculum, teacher improvement initiatives, standards, accountability models and more. The role of principal takes on a greater urgency as accountability becomes more prevalent and a potential shortage of school principals is projected through available data. There was the need for more research to show the impact of education reform in the state of Georgia in relation to the role perceptions of Georgia elementary principals.

The researcher surveyed a random sample of principals throughout the state of Georgia as to their role perceptions concerning the implementation of the A+ Education Reform Act of 2000. The survey included both qualitative and quantitative questions. Using both types of questions allowed the researcher to strengthen the data and gain a more thorough understanding of the principals’
perceptions. The descriptive statistics summarized the data gained from the survey and allowed comparisons to be made according to the differences in the statistics. The open-ended questions provided information that offered the researcher a deeper understanding of the principals’ perceptions throughout the implementation of this mandated educational reform.

The researcher recognized the changes the A+ Education Reform Act of 2000 has placed on leadership across the state, such as increased emphasis on testing; formation of school councils and school report cards; and the researcher sought to gather information from elementary principals on their role perceptions after its implementation. Insight was received in relation to principals’ perspectives and may benefit policy makers and educators in the planning, changing and implementing of additional reform policies that have direct impact on the principals, teachers and students throughout Georgia.
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RESEARCH AND RELATED LITERATURE

The role of principal has expanded during the past decade to include a greater focus on accountability (King, 2002). During school reform the burden falls on the principal to provide the support and vision to mold the faculty into a unified force (Tirozzi, 2000). Policies are without meaning unless accompanied by strong leadership in the school – the critical point where teaching and learning happen. “Schools cannot be transformed, restructured, or reconstituted without leadership” (Tirozzi, p. 68).

Introduction

“Change is necessary. In order for something to be improved, it must be changed. For reform to take place, the change must be radical” (Carlin, 1992, p. 45). Leadership has been regularly reported to correlate with effective schools (Carlin). However, understanding precisely what a principal’s job involves is not a simple task. The job of a principal is complex (Teschke, 1996). Excluding principals themselves, very few people understand the job of a principal. “It sometimes seems that the school principal is the only person who has a true picture of the total educational experience, since all the other players seem to filter their views through their own particular perspectives” (Teschke, p. 10).

The Role of the Principal

Research and practical knowledge point to the significant importance of strong principal leadership that can effectively manage complex systems and
lead improvement (Kelley & Peterson, 2002). Studies on principals have reiterated their importance in promoting school improvement, school effectiveness, and the execution of school reform (Fullan, 1997; Keller, 1998; Tirozzi, 2000).

“Principals hold a special position in schools. They build trust, focus the school, convene and sustain the conversation, and insist on the implementation of policy and practice” (Lambert, 2003, p. 43). As long as there are schools that need improvements, the role of the principal will be essential. A principal that is open, collaborative, and comprehensive can accomplish improvements and effect student learning. However, the role of principal is undergoing profound changes (Lambert).

The principal, as the site administrator, can face a different set of practices and structures in a school that has changed its governance, curriculum, focus and practices (Christenson, 1993). Although the role of the school principal is changing, the principal continues to be important in the building and maintaining of a productive school. Principals have a tremendous impact on the quality of their schools (Teschke, 1996). Principals are crucial to the development and maintenance of effective schools. Principals are accountable for teachers providing students with the skills needed to gain knowledge and show evidence of learning (Hausman, Crow & Sperry, 2000; Schlechty, 1991).

“In responding to the demand for accountability as in dealing with most complex educational issues, leadership is crucial” (Lashway, 1999, p. 3). Those
schools with strong principals that nurture and develop a common vision are better prepared to respond to education reform. The Association of Washington School Principals (1998) lists seven key responsibilities for school leaders: promoting a safe school environment; sustaining a school culture of continuous improvement; implementing data-driven plans for improving student achievement; implementing standards-based assessment; monitoring school-improvement plans; managing human and financial resources to achieve goals; and communicating with parents, community and colleagues to promote student learning. Districts and states must offer principals adequate support and authority to be successful during reform (Lashway).

Since the principal is the person most responsible for carrying out school policies and bureaucratic requirements, how the principal balances the demands has an enormous effect on the school (Richardson, Flannigan, & Prickett, 1991). “Schools cannot be transformed, restructured, or reconstituted without leadership” (Tirozzi, 2000, p. 68). The principal has to provide instructional and curriculum support, data-driven decision making, and a vision for academic achievement. One will seldom find an effective school without also finding an effective principal (Peterson, 2001). School reform will not take place if the principal is not a central force in the reform system (Tirozzi).

The demand for change has resulted in uncertainty about the scope and direction of reform and how school leaders approach it (Lashway, 1997). States have moved toward standards-driven accountability systems based on student performance at a paramount level, while at the same time restructuring efforts
have gained momentum and driven leaders toward vast change. The task of systemic change has been overwhelming for school principals (Lashway).

On a daily basis, a principal's actions are in some way influenced by change (Lunenberg, 1995). Making changes within the work force, changing work methods, changing curriculum all require knowledge of how to manage change effectively. Virtually every time a principal makes a decision, some degree of change occurs. For principals, the challenge is to anticipate and direct change processes so that school performance is improved (Lunenburg).

Principals, both experienced and novice, observe that their job is more demanding and more stressful. Expectations of educational accountability put principals at the center of discussions related to school improvement (Daresh, 2002). Effective principals engage their schools in the basic processes of establishing, maintaining, evaluating, and improving their organization (Kelley & Peterson, 2002). Schools must have a principal that will keep the organization working effectively and continually improving. "In fact, one seldom finds an instructionally effective school without an effective principal" (Kelley & Peterson, p. 252).

Eight years of research on the 1988 Chicago school reform initiative showed evidence of the common key elements of principal leadership in productive schools (Sebring & Bryk, 2000). The researchers reveal through the data that leadership style; strategies and the issues on which the principals focused were common to those studied. The quality of the principal's leadership is a critical factor in determining whether schools are productive (Sebring &
Bryk). In dealing with accountability and school improvement, the roles a principal has to play may change from those used in the past. But it is evident in all effective schools, the principal makes the difference (Carlin, 1992).

Inherent in the reform efforts in education are the implications for school structure and school leadership (Richardson, Flanigan, Prickett, & Short, 1991). If schools are to be successful in addressing the needs of students for the 21st century, then changes must occur not only in instruction but also in the structure for decision-making, collaboration among the participants and accountability (Richardson, et. al). Key in the reform movement is school-based management and decision-making (National Association of Elementary School Principals, 2001). The restructuring of schools will impact the role of the principal and dictate the knowledge and skills that need to be acquired to successfully provide leadership in changing schools. The successful leader will incorporate innovation and risk taking as necessary for renewal and improvement (NAESP).

Lashway (2002) referred to the accountability movement as the “800-pound gorilla of school reform-highly visible, hard to control and impossible to ignore” (p. 15). Lashway advocated that due to the pressures of the accountability movement, principals were not asking how to lead but how to raise test scores. Principals were having to face deeply rooted conditions of school culture when it came to changing teachers’ perceptions. Accountability was focusing on student results, not effort.

Lashway (2002) suggested four challenges of leadership for meeting the demands of accountability. First, Lashway proposed principals should advocate
for standards. In schools where student achievement improved, principals demonstrated that standards were a priority by discussing them at every meeting and teacher evaluation. Second, effective leaders should understand that steadily improved learning is the goal and emphasize learning not performance. Emphasis on immediate results could have a negative effect by reducing risk taking with new methods that may improve performance. Third, principals need to explain data with every opportunity by educating the public. Fourth, principals should carefully balance the demands of accountability with the enthusiasms and values of the teaching and learning community.

The National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP, 2001) reported that principals could no longer merely be administrators and managers. Principals also needed to take on leadership roles in improving instruction and student achievement. NAESP identified six standards for what principals should know and be able to do:

1. Lead schools in a way that places student and adult learning at the center.

2. Set high expectations and standards for academic and social development of all students and the performance of adults.

3. Demand content and instruction that ensure student achievement of agreed-upon academic standards.

4. Create a culture of continuous learning for adults tied to student learning and other school goals.
5. Use multiple sources of data as diagnostic tools to assess, identify and apply instructional improvement.

6. Actively engage the community to create shared responsibility for student and school success (p. 2).

“The job of the principal...has become increasingly complex and constrained. Principals find themselves locked in with less and less room to maneuver” (Fullan, 1998, p.6). Today’s principals have to be able to change in order to enhance problem-solving capacity, empower teachers to address needs, and achieve higher degrees of success (Johnson & Johnson, 1999).

Lashway (2001) contended that for school leaders the challenge of accountability was threefold. First, principals must lead their teachers in finding research-based instructional strategies that result in improved student achievement. This will mean new learning for teachers not just reassigning strategies used in the past. Second, principals must focus resources on a standards-based approach. Funneling of time, staff, materials and practices will greatly impact meeting standards and improve student achievement. Third, principals must provide leadership that supports standards while protecting the school’s values and traditions. Lashway concluded:

All this comes at a time when school leadership itself is being redefined. A decade ago, the accountability challenge evoked images of strong top-down leadership, calling for principals to firmly take the reins, point the direction, and lead the charge. Today, shared decision-making is the norm, and stakeholders expect to have a voice in determining the school’s
direction. Principals retain the ultimate responsibility, but must work with and through others to get the desired results. (p. 2)

To face the challenges principals will meet in the next decade, Ferrandino (2001) pointed out skills principals will need to develop. He felt the most crucial skill was to provide a positive learning environment for a highly diverse student population. By the middle of the new century, minorities will make up more than half of the U.S. population. These children will represent a challenge for school principals who must find a way to ensure these students are accepted, supported and educated (Ferrandino).

Ferrandino (2001) continued with a second important skill - maintaining the focus on what is best for the students. The third skill cited was knowing how to work with groups of teachers, parents, and community members. Ferrandino concluded with the following:

The principalship of the 21st century requires something more than a compendium of skills. It requires the ability to lead others and to stand for important ideas and values that make life meaningful for others. It requires never losing sight of a vision, even while making the hard day-to-day decisions. These attributes are what tomorrow’s principals will need—and what today’s outstanding school leaders already possess. (p. 442)

Education Reform and Accountability

Reflecting on the last two decades, it is evident that A Nation At Risk was one of the most important education reform documents of the twentieth
century (Ravitch, 2003). Upon its release in 1983 by the National Commission on Excellence in Education, national attention was given to the report shaping debates about schooling for all students (Ravitch). The report emphasized reasserting high standards, more demanding graduation requirements, and more rigorous testing (Schlechty, 1991). It shocked the public and gave legitimacy to an already escalating school reform movement (Greenberg, 1989). America was declared a “nation at risk” due to low performance of students and schools, yet educators have not significantly turned the situation around since the publication of this report (Finn, 1992).

The publication of *A Nation at Risk* sparked a new wave of school reform and a renewed emphasis on educational accountability at the federal, state and local levels (Hansen, 1993). Moe (2003) stated the following:

> Our country has been caught up in a frenzy of education reform that has left no state untouched, bringing change upon change to the laws, programs, and curricula to govern public education, more money to see these changes carried out, and greater involvement by the federal government. Every governor now wants to be the education governor, every president the education president. (p.176)

A main concern with these reforms was that they did not produce results as well as policy makers had hoped (SERVE, 1994).

Three presidents elected since *A Nation at Risk* was released have passed broad education reform plans. George W. Bush’s *America 2000*, Bill Clinton’s *Goals 2000*, and George W. Bush’s *No Child Left Behind* all contain
specific goals for improved student achievement (“A Nation,” 2003). These plans had reformers ask themselves what exactly schools were to accomplish to improve student performance (SERVE, 1994).

Accountability has become the “centerpiece of political rhetoric on education reform” (Rotbert, 2001, p.170). Rotbert stated the underlying assumption of accountability was to hold teachers and students accountable for students’ scores on standardized test, and academic standards will rise. Rotbert concluded that current accountability measures may have weakened the academic standards they were intended to raise.

Education reform and accountability have become more and more synonymous. Now to a greater extent, states have been relying more on accountability measures to ensure that their education reform efforts are productive (Ananda & Rabinowitz, 2001). States monitor schools differently than in the past. The primary source of measurement has moved from inputs to outcomes, from the ratio of certified staff to students to that of student achievement (Massell & Fuhrman, 1994; Ananda & Rabinowitz). Performance expectations have risen with results yielding certain consequences. Teachers and administrators now have to demonstrate improvements in student achievement (Ananda & Rabinowitz). The new educational accountability has focused the schools’ attention less on compliance with rules and more on increased learning for students (Elmore, Abelman & Fuhrman, 1996).

Changes in state accountability systems have occurred simultaneously with changes in understanding how to measure educational performance. States
have had to decide whom to hold accountable, for what levels of performance, for what types of indicators, and with what consequences (Elmore, Abelman & Fuhrman, 1996). Many states tended to overload their reform efforts, resulting in too complex of a system with questionable reliability, validity, and fairness (Ananda & Rabinowitz, 2001). Linn (2000) described two basic approaches to state accountability, which included comparing a school’s student performance data to absolute performance standards established by the state or examining a school’s overall performance growth over time through cross-sectional or longitudinal analyses.

In the past, principals and teachers could meet the demands of accountability by working hard and following acceptable practices. However, today’s policy makers emphasize results (Lashway, 1999). Five elements have been identified by the Southern Regional Education Board as being a part of today’s accountability systems. These elements include rigorous content standards, student testing, staff development aligned with standards and testing, reporting test results with rewards and sanctions being evident in systems (1998). Establishing and using these elements can provide a coordinated effort to improve student learning. Standards provide the clear target; assessments provide the evidence of progress to the goals; professional development aligned with the standards helps schools progress; results put pressure for improvement while the rewards and sanctions render verdicts to schools (Lashway).

Nowhere in the history of education has there been such a demand for American educators to deliver their finest performance (Streshly & Newcomer,
Politicians, starting with the president and moving downward, urged accountability at every level of American society. Accountability is not a trend but a permanent feature in education today. Whether it is called reform, restructuring, or teacher empowerment, the implication is the same: educators must organize the schools, unleash the productivity of the teachers and hold schools accountable for learning outcomes (Streshly & Newcomer).

**Standards**

Efforts to improve American schools have focused on standards-based reform for more than a decade directing new attention on the achievement of students and on accountability (Ladd & Zelli, 2002). Even though establishing standards has been awkward, the standards movement has started a discussion across the United States about what students should know in different subject areas (Scherer, 2001). Standards hold the greatest possibility for significantly improving student achievement:

Every other policy mandate we’ve tried hasn’t done so. For example, right after *A Nation at Risk* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, 1983) was published, we tried to increase academic achievement by making graduation requirements more rigorous. That was the first wave of reform, but it didn’t make much of an effort. The creation of standards documents by national subject matter organizations, such as the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, set the stage for implementing standards. (p. 14)
“The nation is now well into its second decade of a concerted effort to improve schools and substantially increase student learning by adopting challenging standards for what students should know and be able to do” (Cross & Rice, 2000, p 61). The standards movement has established school agendas in virtually every state and in most of the school districts across the nation (Cross & Rice). It makes sound educational sense for there to be standardized expectations with respect to goals, content and levels of achievement (Holbein, 1998).

An extensive alliance of constituencies has adopted the standards-based reform as a means of improving public schools’ accountability, creating a competitive work force, and narrowing the achievement gap between racial and ethnic groups (Hadderman, 2000). Standards should be grounded in core academic subjects, dictate ends, not means, be rigorous, have public support, and be aligned with appropriate and valid assessments and most experts would agree that the national standards debate is over (Hadderman).

Glickman (2001) reported the following:

Standards policies are a significant issue in education because they affect nearly every student, faculty member, and school in the country and have a direct bearing on how we define well-educated students, the curriculum to be taught, and the ultimate purpose of our schools. (p. 47)

According to Marzano (2002), the standards movement is the outcome of political pressure to discover a solution for the perceived shortcomings of public education. Marzano argued that without a standardized curriculum in place,
schools will have a small chance of improving their level of effectiveness. He recommended that a standardized curriculum exist with identified material and allotted time for coverage, along with continuity and the basis for academic grading among teachers. Marzano further argued that principals, to assure continuity, would need to monitor the carrying out of standards. Marzano recapitulated his conclusions by stating:

> I am well aware that the three criteria I have outlined represent major changes in the culture of schooling for some, and probably many, principals. However, unless the changes implied by these criteria are made, I fear that political forces critical of public education may use our lack of evidence of significant improvement in student achievement to increase their efforts to dismantle our current system. (Marzano, 2002, p. 9)

If standards and accountability are not to fail, they must be more than just a “world-class sound bite for political leaders” (Gratz, 2000, p. 681). If standards and accountability are to enhance schools and improve student achievement rather than penalize teachers, schools, and children for political advantage, advocates must guarantee standards are appropriate, the assessments are fair, and the implementation is realistic (Gratz).

Having dealt with the demands of accountability and standards as both a superintendent and president of the Institute for Student Achievement, House (2002) concluded “standards are essential to effective school reform. Without standards to guide changes and link reform measures, our initiatives are
in danger of becoming fragmented and isolated. Standards are the key to building coherence throughout all our efforts” (p. 2).

Accountability is fulfilled when teachers understand how standards can serve them (Lashway, 2002). Cross and Rice (2000) stated that standards should be clear statements of what students should know and be able to do and how well they should know and demonstrate the content. Students should know which standards they are studying. Students should also know how they are performing according to the standard.

“If standards are to serve the learning of all, then they must be defined to promote the learning goals for all” (Falk, 2002, p.613). Standards must take into consideration how children learn, be appropriate for developmental stages, and be broad enough to focus on the essentials rather than countless information students must memorize. When standards are grounded in these, they will provide educators with common points of reference (Falk).

In 1993, ten years after the release of *A Nation at Risk* alerted people to the suspected inadequate state of American education, it was clear that American education needed to be strengthened at every level (Riley, 2002). The idea of higher standards for all children surfaced, but only in “starts and fits” (Riley). Improving education moved to the top of the nation’s agenda, and a consensus formed around the need to “raise standards for all children, increase accountability, close the achievement gap, and reach clear national education goals” (Riley, p.700).
EdSource reported a primary purpose of the standards-based reform movement was to promote “high standards for all” (EdSource, 2003, p.28). It was developed in part to address achievement gaps that were often based on family income, ethnicity, disability or fluency in English. Other purposes included providing a measure of performance that may be more objective than grades and a consistent gauge of performance and skill levels (EdSource).

Glickman (2001) stated the movement for state standards and accountability as one of a “complex phenomenon” (p.47). States are not the same: the scope of standards, the types of assessments, and the usage of both can vary. Glickman reported that such states as Texas, Connecticut, Michigan and New York are highly prescriptive, maintain tight control over the curriculum and the consequences of test results are high for students, teachers and principals. Other states such as Maryland, Maine and Vermont use assessments that are broader and allow options and discretion on the part of districts and schools.

Since the mid-1990s, both federal and state levels of education policy sent strong and consistent signs concerning the goals of standards-based reform. Goertz (2001) stated the goals included “(1) high academic standards, (2) accountability for student outcomes, (3) the inclusion of all students in reform initiatives, and (4) flexibility to foster instructional change” (p. 63).

Gandal & Vranek (2001) concluded:

Every state and thousands of school districts have embraced the standards agenda for the same reason that Horace Mann, who
championed the “common school” in the 19th century, used assessments to compare the quality of schools. This sort of comparison shines the spotlight on inequity and helps raise the achievement of all students….teachers know intuitively the more we expect from children, the more they will achieve. (p. 7)

Prompted by the Bush agenda, the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) and the U. S. Department of Education independently prepared standards creating standardized expectations for student performance in the areas of math, science, language arts, civics, the arts, geography, and foreign languages (Holbein, 1998). States were offered federal funding to develop and implement standards and most have assumed the challenge and developed curriculum frameworks and assessment techniques (Holbein).

States have for the most part embraced the broad objective and design of standards-based reform. Goertz (2001) reported that 49 states have developed content standards in at least reading and mathematics, and 48 states have statewide assessments in these subjects. Thirty-three states have performance-based accountability systems (Goertz). In sites studied by the Consortium for Policy Research in Education (CPRE), state- and district-developed standards set expectations for student achievement and guided curriculum development, planning for school improvement, assessments and professional development (Goertz).

Public Agenda, a non-profit, nonpartisan policy research organization, surveyed public school parents and found that only 2 percent favor abandoning
standards (Gandal & Vranek, 2001). A majority of those responding wanted their schools to continue implementing standards rather than to go back to the way things were before the standards reform began. The support was as strong in five large cities in the midst of standards-based reform—Boston, Chicago, Cleveland, Los Angeles, and New York as it was nationally (Gandal & Vranek).

In January 2001, *Education Week* released national survey results that probed United States teachers’ views of standards, testing and accountability (Gandal & Vranek, 2001). Eighty-seven percent of surveyed teachers agreed that raising standards is “very much” or “somewhat” a “move in the right direction” and 74 percent believe the level of standards is close to what it should be. Gandal and Vranek (2001) offered the survey as strong evidence that standards-based reforms are working since a majority of teachers reported more students are reading, writing and meeting more challenging expectations in the classroom.

Gandel and Vranek (2001) continued by stating that strong public support did not always assure successful and widespread improvement. The key to standards is in the implementation so they will lead to a richer, more challenging curriculum. When standards are poorly devised and implemented, accountability can become an agitation and a source of frustration in schools (Gandel & Vranek).

Schwartz (2002) also reported that polls have shown strong public support for the need of higher standards and more accountability. Between 75% and 80% of parents support those propositions. Teacher support was mixed in that teachers agreed that the curriculum was more demanding than it had been and
that their expectations were now higher, but teachers also said they needed more support. When asked whether they were being provided with enough professional development concerning state standards, less than one-third of the teachers polled agreed (Schwartz).

Business leaders and governors from the United States started the nonprofit, bipartisan organization named Achieve to help states determine the difference between high-quality and poor-quality standards, assessments and accountability policies (Gandel & Vranek, 2001). For three years, Gandel and Vranek worked with almost half the states to examine their policies in comparison with the best examples from other states and then offer proposals for improvement. They made several conclusions from the study that challenge states to face if standards are to bring lasting improvement: (1) standards must be teachable with regard to clarity and specificity; (2) standards must be rigorous but reasonable; (3) testing must be aligned with the standards they are measuring; (4) professional development is needed for teachers to provide them with the training tools, and support they need to help students reach high standards; and (5) interventions and a support system should be in place for those students who do not meet the standards.

Several states have responded to these challenges. (Gandel & Vranek, 2001). Indiana clarified its state standards in 2000 to provide more detail and guidance, aligned curriculum with embedded assessments. Vermont used technology to help teachers align teaching with assessments in accordance with state standards. The state system included instructional planning and
assessment tools and a database of its standards. In New York City, The United Federation of Teachers has started an effort to help align standards and provide teachers time away from work to develop a bank of lesson plans aligned to standards (Gandel & Vranek).

“The ideas underlying the standards and accountability have merit and the inequities among schools must be addressed “(Gratz, 2000, p. 686). Educators and parents along with state leaders must ensure that the impact of the policies and standards are evaluated. Standards have two primary purposes: (1) to address the concern that both the country’s and student’s best interests require demanding more from each student and school; and (2) to address the gap between high- and low-achieving students. If initiators and supporters of standards held themselves to high standards, everyone would benefit (Gratz). Standards have the “potential to be of enormous benefit to teaching and learning. Well developed standards…can initiate a dynamic process that has the potential to transform the culture of teaching…and can help support a new vision of teaching, learning and assessment into a seamless web (Falk, 2002, p. 620).

Nave, Miech and Mosteller (2000) reported that standards-based reforms may improve student achievement, but little research links standards to achievement. They recommended all advocates of standards-based reform summarize the methods by which their particular strategies might improve student achievement so further research can be used to examine the links. A substantial body of research in needed over the next several years providing
evidence of how and when various types of standards-based reforms lead to improved student achievement (Nave, Miech & Mosteller).

**Testing**

“Today’s widespread implementation of standards-based reform and the federal government’s commitment to test-based accountability ensure that testing will remain a central issue in education for the foreseeable future” (Abrams & Madaus, 2003, p. 31). Test results will offer useful information regarding student progress toward meeting standards. But policy makers insist on connecting test scores to consequences for students and schools and often fail to recognize flaws in this practice (Abrams & Madaus).

The logic of high-stakes testing seems compelling. Test students and see what they can do. Hold them or their schools accountable if they fail to make the grade. Rather than micro-manage schools, policy makers can dictate that content standards and performance standards be created to codify expected learning outcomes and then let teachers and school administrators determine how best to attain those outcomes. (Haertel, 1999, p. 662)

As a result of standards-based reform, many states have developed accountability systems that provide a range of positive incentives and sanctions to affect student achievement, as typically measured by test scores (Ladd & Zelli, 2002). Accountability, still in its infancy, demands results in the form of student achievement consisting of average scores on school, state or national tests (Gratz, 2000, Lashway, 2000). The current slogan of “high standards for all
students” translates into “higher test scores for all students” (Lashway, 2000). Many states have decided that their assessments must be “high-stakes” ones or tests that significantly determine opportunities and outcomes for those taking the test as well as those giving it (Gratz, 2000).

“Testing has been a dominant tool of education reform policy since the 70s” (Archibald & Porter, 1990, p.1). Tests have signified quality control and accountability to both the public and legislators and have been promoted to help restore “high educational standards and accountability for performance” (Archibald & Porter, p.1). Improved measurement of student and school performance for accountability has been a consistent priority in education reform. As states increased reform policies, testing was also increased. (Archibald & Porter).

One of the most consistent elements of educational reform has been the increase use of testing (Hamilton & Koretz, 2002). “Standardized achievement tests have been used to measure students’ educational progress for nearly a century, but the prevalence of those tests, and the number of purposes they are asked to serve have grown substantially during the past two decades” (Hamilton, Stecher & Klein, 2002, p 1). Large-scale testing is common in most state and national reform efforts. Most states have some form of testing in place that incorporates goals, measures, targets and incentives. The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001, mandates specific test-based accountability components such as yearly testing of students in grades three through eight in reading and
math, specific forms of reporting, and tracking of school performance (Hamilton & Koretz).

Linn (2000) stated several reasons for the policy makers using assessments as an agent of reform. First, assessments are inexpensive when compared to changes involving increasing instructional time, reducing class size, hiring teacher aides, or implementing new programs that will involve a substantial level of staff development. Second, assessments can be externally mandated. It is much easier to mandate testing than it is to take action on strategies used in the classroom. Third, new assessments can be rapidly implemented. Fourth, assessment results are visible and can be reported to the press (Linn).

Systems of assessment and systems of accountability, according to Sirotnik (2002) need to be differentiated. Assessment or testing systems are about establishing and using tests to collect information concerning teaching and learning and then making judgments based on the information collected. Accountability systems are what is done with the assessments and typically takes the form of rewards and sanctions against students, schools and school districts, based on test score indicators. Bringing responsible practice to accountability will require showing good reasoning and taking advantage of the decades of knowledge already established concerning assessments and accountability (Sirotnik).

“Test-based accountability systems are based on the belief that public education can be improved through a simple strategy: require all students to take standardized achievement tests and attach high stakes to the tests in the form of
rewards when the test scores improve and sanctions when they do not” (Hamilton, Stecher, and Klein, 2002, p. iii). In the current environment, it is important that policy makers understand the strengths and weaknesses of large-scale tests used as both measurement instruments and as policy tools (Hamilton, et. al). Many policy makers as well as administrators, teachers and parents do not fully understand the relationship between testing and learning (Pearson, Vyas, Sensale, & Kim, 2001). Even though careful study proposes that standardized testing assesses only pieces of what students are exposed to in schools, a great number of people believe that they really do assess a student’s learning in the classroom (Pearson, et. al).

If the foremost purpose of testing was to help schools evaluate and address individual student learning needs, testing should then provide valuable information. Schools fear that the public, media, and policy makers may see a single test score as an absolute indicator of student learning or teacher/school effectiveness (Hogan, 2002). How a student performs on a standardized test on a particular day, no matter how commanding the test, can only provide a snapshot of the student’s potential. A student’s ability must be considered using a variety of assessment measures gathered over time (Hogan).

Concentrating on high scores for the sake of high scores, as appears to be some of the case in some high-stakes accountability programs, diminishes the validity of the test and makes it less useful in tracking gains and losses (Smith & Fey, 2000). Many American schools have tests driving instruction and it appears that education has become primarily about raising test scores (Johnson &
Johnson, 2002). Instructional time is spent preparing students for the tests. Test preparation books, supplements and computer programs are used as part of curriculum (Johnson & Johnson).

Johnson and Johnson (2002) cited opponents arguments against high-stakes testing: (1) test scores should not be the sole indicator for advancement but one of several (only Kentucky and Vermont use student portfolios); (2) students should not be held to the same standards when there is a wide difference in funding and support; (3) curriculum, books, and resources should be aligned to state standards; (4) validity of test score levels must be psychometric not political; and (5) test scores must be interpreted in light of students in special education. Other criticisms include loss of instructional time, narrowing the curriculum and centralizing decision-making (Johnson & Johnson, Meisels, 1989).

Studies conducted recently looking at the effects of high-stakes testing and its impact on student achievement arrived at different conclusions (“Examining”, 2003). Amrein and Berliner, both of Arizona State University, looked at data from 18 states where high-stakes testing programs were in place. Researchers examined the states to see if their high-stakes testing programs were affecting student learning, the outcome intended for these policies (Amrein & Breliner, 2002). Test results from the states were compared with the performance of students from each state on measures of student achievement, such as American College Test (ACT), Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) and Advanced Placement assessments.
The study found no systemic evidence of improved achievement after states implemented high-stakes testing programs (Amrein & Berliner, 2002). According to Amrein and Berliner, evidence in all but one analysis showed student learning “indeterminate”, at the same level prior to policy implementation, or even going down after policy implementation. Amrein and Berliner concluded:

While a state’s high-stakes test may show increased scores, there is little support in these data that such increases are anything but the result of test preparation and/or the exclusion of students from the testing process… the success of a high-stakes testing policy is whether it affects student learning, not whether it can increase student scores on a particular test. If student learning is not affected, the validity of a state’s test is in question. (p. 2)

In another study by Carnoy and Loeb of Stanford University, after examining similar data, they concluded that a positive effect on achievement was found with high-stakes testing programs (“Examining”, 2003). The study showed that in states with high-stakes testing and tougher accountability programs in place there was an improvement on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) mathematics portion throughout the late 1990s. The stronger the testing program, the greater the gains students made on the eighth grade NAEP test in math between 1996 and 2000 with the gains chiefly to those scoring in the proficient level on the test. Also, the scores of fourth graders improved in states with programs more than the states without strong testing programs. (“Examining”)
Even though there are criticisms against high-stakes testing, it is evident that public and institutional support for it remains high (Williams, 2001). Sixty-eight percent of those surveyed by Time Magazine said students should have to pass statewide tests to graduate, and 75 percent thought that elementary students should pass statewide tests to move to the next grade (Williams). Testing can help by “enhancing student learning and retention and identifying students and schools in trouble....” (Williams, p. 26).

Many researchers contend that high-stakes testing policies have worsened the quality of our schools and that the unintended negative effects overshadow the intended positive benefits (Amrein & Berliner, 2002; Linn. 2001). Since testing policies and programs and their effects are changing, analysis of the research on this issue will be needed every few years. (Amrein & Berliner).

Based on analyses of validity, credibility, positive impact of assessment and accountability systems while minimizing the negative effects, Linn (2000) suggested seven items for assessments and accountability: (1) provide precautions against selective exclusion of students from testing; (2) require high-quality assessments each year; (3) seek multiple indicators instead of a single test; (4) emphasize comparisons of performance from year to year; (5) take into account value added and status in the system; (6) recognize the degree of uncertainty in the data; and (7) evaluate the intended positive effects and unintended negative effects of the assessment system.

“High-stakes state tests have become the accountability tool of choice in many states as policy makers struggle to find ways to increase student
achievement levels” (McColskey & McMunn, 2002, p. 115). Educators have responded to the demands for improved state scores with a push to implement short-term strategies designed to get the scores up. The larger goal of developing an increasing number of students who are productive in a complex society has been somewhat overlooked (McColskey & McMunn).

Horn (2003) stated that although the use of standardized tests was intended to assist in the improvement of public education and in many ways it has, it has also created problems related to misuse or overuse. Test scores can offer us important information, but test scores alone do not give us all the information necessary to make critical decisions and using state-mandated large-scale testing as a single measure for “student-level high-stakes purposes is unadvisable” (p. 38).

Rotbert (2001) discussed several unintended consequences of the fixation on high-stakes testing. One, high-stakes testing weakens academic standards when the test becomes the education program. When teachers and students are accountable for test scores, an emphasis on the test is inevitable. The focus on testing can narrow the curriculum and have schools spending much of the time on test preparation activities.

Second, high-stakes testing weakens the quality of education by encouraging policies that may not be in the students best interest especially when all children are required to be included in the testing program. Some “make it easy to assign students to special programs specifically to exempt potentially low-scoring students from the test” (Rotbert, 2002, p. 171). Rotbert
further explained that states, like Kentucky and Texas that have placed strong emphasis on test-based accountability now have reports of increased grade retention. Rotbert reported that an assessment coordinator from Kentucky felt that due to a fewer number of students after grade 9, it could be perceived to the school’s advantage to get students to drop out rather than to keep them and have poor test scores at grade 12.

Even though there has been a great deal of energy and resources placed on test-based accountability, the tests do not actually tell about the quality of the education program a school offers (Rotbert, 2001). A test cannot take the place of a comprehensive and sustained academic program. Without attention to this, “no amount of testing—high stakes or otherwise—will improve our schools” (Rotbert, p. 171).

School Report Cards

School report cards have become widespread in many states (Gullant & Ritter, 2002; Dingerson, 2001; French & Bobbett, 1994). As states concentrate more on the academic performance of schools, report cards have developed into a popular tool to communicate to parents and other community stakeholders and educators (Gullant & Ritter).

“School report cards are public statements of the condition of individual schools and the results of their education programs” (Jeager; Gorney & Johnson, 1994, p. 42). Two kinds of report cards dominate today. Individual report cards notify parents and the public about a particular school. Compiled report cards,
which are prepared by administrators and school boards, are made up of tables comparing statistics collected from a set of schools (Jeager et al.).

School report cards differ tremendously from state to state. (Gullant & Ritter, 2002; French & Bobbett, 1995, French & Bobbett, 1994). “No two states report exactly the same information on their report cards, nor are any two report cards similar in format and appearance” (Gullant & Ritter, p. 42). An examination of the report cards suggested that their variations may have little to do with the data presented that are valuable to educators, policy makers and parents in improving education and more to do with policies and the politics of education (French & Bobbett, 1994).

While much of the debate on education policy has centered on the need for accountability, little attention has been given to parents and what information they should be presented with to evaluate if their child’s school is doing well or poorly (Dingerson, 2001). The collection and distribution of school performance data to parents and the public can be one of the most important accountability measures that school districts can implement. Parents and their children are the ultimate consumers of the public education system and they should be part of the accountability process (Dingerson).

The rationale of report cards by and large is twofold: “to create a dialogue between parents and educators and to ensure schools are accountable for spending taxpayers dollars” (Goldman, 1990, p. 26). But many administrators have reservations about the value of the report cards due to the time and cost of
producing them and the minimal impact they seem to be having on parents. (Goldman).

It is assumed that the use of school report cards will lead to an improvement in student performance by providing information and spurring the low-performing schools to take action on reforms and motivating parents to become more involved in demanding an increase in school effectiveness (Gullatt & Ritter, 2002). Report cards can also serve as a marketing tool assuring parents that their money has been well spent.

Dingerson (2001) reported that most report cards are published on the state education agency (SEA) website and many states require them to be sent home to parents or printed in the local newspapers. Dingerson stated that states providing individual school profiles or report cards are failing to include important data that could make the card more useful to parents as well as administrators. Dingerson further stated that much of this data was already being collected at the state or local level but not necessarily placed on report cards. In a similar study, Kernan-Schloss (1999) found too that school report cards didn’t include information that the public considered vitally important, such as school safety and teacher qualifications.

Americans have become fixated with documenting student achievement (Ediger, 2000). Many tests are given annually to students in an attempt to verify what learning has taken place. Administrators, teachers and parents need to be familiar with the comparisons made using the data. When schools are compared to one another, significant variables need to be taken into consideration including
the demographics of the population as well as the types of tests being administered (Ediger).

Ediger (2000) stated five concerns with using testing information on report cards. First, using standardized tests is usually a "one shot case" to show evidence of learning. This data can possibly leave out the daily work engaged in by the students. Second, students must show their optimal achievement during testing which doesn’t take into consideration those that may feel ill, tense or anxious. Third, there is a “one size fits all” approach when standardized testing is used. This could be different from the way students are taught in the classroom when individual differences have to be provided for. Fourth, many variables are omitted when test results are reported among school systems. Suburban students tend to have more opportunities than students living in a rural area. Fifth, academic learnings are not the only important factor for students. Students differ in interests and abilities and need to be exposed to a variety of subjects (Ediger).

Dingerson (2001) reported that The Center for Community Change conducted a study to compare school report cards already in existence as well as study the formats used to provide parents with information. Through interviews with parents, community groups, education advocates and experts, the Center for Community Change identified seven indicators that should be required as part of the individual school report cards in all states. These indicators included: (1) assessment scores disaggregated as required by Title 1 law; (2) information about the quality of the school’s staff; (3) average class size by grade; (4) four-
year graduation rates; (5) information on suspensions and expulsions (disaggregated); (6) notification of any school with low performance; and (7) identifying any overcrowding. States should be free to have any additional data beyond the seven indicators given.

A detailed study on report cards by Kernan-Schloss (1999) stated guidelines that should be used when developing comprehensive school report cards. These guidelines were compiled after analyzing the schools and districts that seemed to be producing the more productive report cards. The guidelines included: (1) be strategic about what is reported; (2) include front-end planning for better communication; (3) report more than test scores; (4) make the test scores meaningful; (5) make the report easy to read and as short as possible; and (6) help the public understand how to use the information.

French and Bobbett (1994) analyzed school report cards across eleven southeastern states for similarities and differences in five categories: (1) instruments measuring student performance; (2) student outcomes and procedures used for reporting them; (3) levels of data reported (district, school, grade level, classroom); (4) factors concerning school and community; and (5) statistical process used in evaluating data. French and Bobbett generalized that from state to state there was a minimal commonality in the performance measures and indicators. There was little attempt to determine relationships between characteristics of the school and community and student performance. According to French and Bobbett, there appeared to be an assumption that the student/school/community characteristics reported influenced outcomes.
In a similar study, French and Bobbett (1995) studied report cards from eight eastern states in the same fashion as the prior study and determined many of the same generalizations. After analyzing report cards from nineteen states, French and Bobbett concluded that school report cards could be an extremely useful tool for school improvement, but that potential has not yet been reached. States have made little attempt to factor into report cards information that might be useful to other educators desiring to improve the performance of their schools.

If school report cards are designed effectively, they can inform parents about the effectiveness of their children’s schools. The school report card, if effective, can let the public know what is right about local schools and what areas need improvement (Jeager, Gorney, & Johnson, 1994).

**School Councils**

School councils are a prominent characteristic of school reform initiatives despite little evidence about their contribution to school improvements. (Parker & Leithwood, 2000). The education of our students must be supported by not only the schools, but also by the homes and communities (Cunningham, 2003). Cunningham stated that through the involvement of school councils, education will obtain the respect, trust and support that it needs.

School councils and other forms of shared decision-making are included in most reform efforts. (Parker & Leithwood, 2000). Decentralization has been viewed as a foundation in reform efforts but generally has been embedded within the large improvement effort. Advocates of shared decision making support that
improvement in schools will take place when those closest to the students are given the authority to make important decisions (Parker & Leithwood).

As a device for accountability, school councils can be classified as a decentralized approach (Parker & Leithwood, 2000). The use of school councils can assist with schools becoming more client oriented by reducing the distance between administrators, teachers, parents, stakeholders and students (Parker & Leithwood).

Patterson (1998) stated that decentralization was in the strictest sense decision-making that was not centralized. Patterson continued with decentralized decision making extending well beyond moving power from the superintendent to the principal. Decentralization becomes clearer as school districts struggle with core organizational values about who should decide which decisions.

Current reform efforts across the country are emphasizing the importance of site-based decision making (Southard, Muldoon & Porter, 1997; Van Meter, 1994). However, the kinds of decision-making powers delegated under the name site-based decision making (SBDM) may vary, ranging from direct authority to advisory (Van Meter, 1994).

In an attempt to assess schools that used SBDM, Southard, Muldoon and Porter (1997) conducted a study in the Leon County Florida Schools. Both principals and council chairs were interviewed as well as a random sample of school council members was surveyed. Over two-thirds of those interviewed stated that student learning had been affected by SBDM, but only 10% of those indicated that traditional measures such as test scores had increased. Sixty-two
percent of those interviewed did cite that improvements were in the educational process such as improvements in curriculum and focusing more on student learning (Southern, et. al).

Of those surveyed during the same study, 82% believed that councils should be continued in the schools responding and that the quality of decisions has improved due to SBDM (Southern, et. al, 1997). Only 45-50 % of those surveyed believed academic performance and student learning had improved due to the school council and its involvement with the school (Southern, et. al).

Chicago’s public schools have undergone reform, which included decentralizing operational decision-making for the schools from the central Board of Education to parent-dominated Local School Councils (LSCs) (Krishnamoorthi, 2000). Educators do not challenge the basic idea that LSCs and school-based management can help achieve higher student achievement. The concern is in regard to the implementation process and whether schools fully realize the benefits from councils. Educators question if the members have the proper training to do an adequate job as well as the amount of authority the councils possess (Krishnamoorthi). In a study conducted on LSCs in Chicago public schools, the results showed that the training school council members received was important for the proper functioning of the council as well as the council leading a school toward higher student achievement (Krishnamoorthi).

In Chicago, Local School Councils (LSCs) with a majority of elected parent and community members exercise substantial school-level decision making powers, based on a state law passed in 1988. They hire their school’s principal
on a four-year performance contract, set priorities for school improvement, and
determine the school’s budget (Moore, 2002, p. 6). Moore stated that based on a
decade of research, judgments could be made based on hard evidence rather
than opinion.

A report summarizing two major studies on LSCs analyzed the
effectiveness of those councils across the 550 schools in Chicago (Moore, 2002).
Reviewing the research justified two broad conclusions: (1) the overall level of
viability of LSCs is clearly established and the councils should be further
strengthened; and (2) the impact on educational quality and student achievement
can be strengthened (Moore).

The report included the evidence of strengths and weaknesses of LSCs.
Several positive findings were as follows: (1) LSC members had good
educational backgrounds and were significantly better educated than the average
Illinois resident; (2) the typical LSC meeting had a quorum; (3) a majority of the
LSCs were carrying out their duties; (4) very few LSC members were engaged in
corrupt activity; and (5) many LSCs have built collaborative partnerships between
the school and other community resources (Moore, 2002).

Negative findings from the report included: (1) 25% - 33% were performing
but needed support and were not proactive in providing leadership to their
school; (2) those identified as highly functioning still had room for significant
improvement when judged by rigorous standards; and (3) there was no
significant improvement between 1990 and 2000 in student achievement or in
dropout rates Chicago’s high school students, once changes were taken into
account showing a need for a new level of effectiveness to help solve this problem (Moore, 2002).

It is increasingly evident that under particular conditions, school councils can be useful tools for parent participation and a moderate but positive force for school and classroom change (Parker & Leithwood, 2000). Most administrators and teachers do not begin with strong beliefs in the positive benefits of school councils and their positive effects on students. But principal leadership can be the key to successfully implementing school councils. Strong but supportive leadership can help determine the extent to which teachers come to view greater parent and community participation as a positive force in their schools (Parker & Leithwood).

Education Reform Movements

“No matter what high-level statistical methods a state may use in its accountability system, determining which accountability design or model to use is a fundamental decision” (Ananda & Rabinowitz, 2001, p 5). There are two basic approaches to school accountability. The most commonly used approach is comparing student performance data to performance standards established by the state. Another approach is to examine a school’s overall performance growth over time through cross-sectional or longitudinal analysis (Ananda & Rabinowitz).

Archibald and Porter (1990) stated that educational reform calls for three things. First, a systemic and rational set of policies needs to be put in place at all levels of the school. Second, review all current state and district level educational policies so that those policies standing in the way of reform efforts can be
discontinued. Third, a system of indicators should be put in place to monitor progress over time against the goals set (Archibald & Porter).

Texas

As *A Nation at Risk* was generating nationwide concern, the state of Texas began its own educational reform efforts (Hogan, 2000). The decade of the 1980s was the beginning of an examination, legislative consideration, and a public education renewal. In two short decades, the Texas public education system was revamped by increasing standards and expectations for school districts, individual schools, teachers and students (Hogan).

The Texas State Board of Education published its own report in 1983 titled *A State in Motion in the Midst of A Nation at Risk* in an attempt to be in the forefront of the reform movement (Parr, 1993). Texas legislators worked towards the goal of improving the quality, equity and effectiveness of public education (Clark, 1993). In the 1980s legislators initiated reform that defined the essential elements of school curriculum and included such provisions as funding for public school prekindergarten and the teacher career ladder. Between 1981 and 1991 more than thirty additional initiatives effected Texas public education. (Clark).

Texas’ accountability model focused on the current status of a school, with all schools held to a common standard (Ananda & Rabinowitz, 2001). The reform model built measurement into every aspect of the system (Chaddock, 2000). Schools reported results on the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) in reading, math and writing by race, ethnicity, and poverty level of their students. School leaders were called on to track the performance of all students as a whole
as well as those targeted groups. Each district and school was given one of four categories depending on the test scores. *Exemplary* was given when at least 90% of all students and each student group (African American, Hispanic, White, and economically disadvantaged) passed each section of the TAAS; *Recognized* was given when at least 80% of all students and each student group passed each section of the TAAS; *Academically Acceptable/Acceptable* was given when at least 45% of all students and each student group passed each section of the TAAS; and *Academically Unacceptable/Low-performing* was given for not meeting the standards for academically acceptable or higher and not achieving required improvement in identified low-performing areas. In addition to its accountability system, Texas lowered class sizes in grades K through four and began to provide pre-K education for all children (Chaddock). Chaddock reports:

Supporters say that this system creates a clear incentive for teachers to teach and students to learn. From 1990 to 1997, Texas outranked nearly every other state in gains on the widely respected National Assessment of Educational Progress. Most recently, its black and Hispanic students ranked No.1 and 2 in the nation on the 1999 NAEP writing assessment (p.13).

A record number of Texas schools – 1,048, or 16 percent of the state's schools earned the top rating of exemplary in 1998 (Johnston, 1999). In 1997, only 683 schools earned exemplary status. Low performing schools were at a record low in 1998 with a total of 59 schools receiving the lowest level (Johnston).
To date, the accountability system subject to the most intense external analysis is that of Texas (Ladd & Zelli, 2002). Studies of the system in Texas have paid close attention to the fairness of the state test and the impact the system had on test scores, dropout rates and retention (Ladd & Zelli). Texas reform has its detractors but high-stakes testing and accountability appears to be making a difference (Miller, 1998). However, data are now beginning to emerge that may document that the Texas system has conflicts (McNeil, 2000). Walter Haney analyzed graduation rates of high school students from 1978 to the present showing that more that 60% of black students and nearly 60% of Latinos graduated – but this was 15% below the average graduation rate for whites. By 1990, graduation rates for blacks, Latinos and also whites had dropped. According to Haney, fewer than 50% of blacks and Latinos graduated along with approximately 70% of whites. By 1999, the data reflected that the white graduation rate had improved to close to 75% but the rate for Latinos and blacks still remained below 50%. These discrepancies showed that accountability in Texas may still perpetuate inequities with minorities (McNeill).

“There have been several iterations of state testing and test-driven curricula implemented since the reforms first began under the Perot legislation in Texas in the mid-1980s” (McNeill, 2000, p. 728). The TAAS referred more to the public as the “Texas Accountability System” held teachers and principals accountable and was used as the central mechanism for decisions about student learning. Student scores on standardized tests were used to measure the quality of teachers and principals. Under TAAS, fewer opportunities for authentic
teaching were evident (McNeill). Principals report “there can be little discussion of children’s development, of cultural relevance, of children’s contributions to classroom knowledge and interactions, or of those engaging sidebar experiences at the margins of the official curriculum where children often do their best learning” (McNeill, 2000, p. 729).

McNeill reported that in many minority schools where case studies were conducted large amounts of class time was spent practicing “bubbling in” answers and going over ways to recognize the wrong answers or distracters. TAAS-prep materials were used in lieu of the regular curriculum. Test scores generated by TAAS and by the test-prep materials designed to generate higher scores were not reliable indicators of learning. In one Latino school, teachers reported that even though more students were passing TAAS reading tests, few students choose to read or to share books with classmates. In the schools studied, there was little or no will to address this gap (McNeill, 2000).

Kentucky

In contrast to Texas, Kentucky’s accountability system, Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA) looked at changes in performance, comparing student cohorts across grades (Ananda & Rabinowithz, 2001). An “authentic” system in the form of performance exams with open-ended responses along with collections of student work was developed (Elmore, Abelman & Furhman, 1996). Kentucky uses an index approach or formula, and gives a numerical value that shows how well schools were performing along a continuum. Using a two-year accountability cycle, schools are required to meet growth goals based on their
baseline performance. KERA also sets a common achievement goal for all schools to accomplish by the end of a twenty-year period (Ananda & Rabinowitz). The measure of the effectiveness of schools has shifted from course requirements and time in class to what students know and are able to do. The legislation acknowledges that state government, communities, parents, teachers, and students are all stakeholders in the process and all are responsible for student achievement (Steffy & English, 1994).

In designing the KERA, one of the foremost problems facing the Kentucky legislature was raising the standards for what students know and are able to do. Through a comprehensive process, the Kentucky Department of Education (KDOE) identified seventy-five learner outcomes that every student that graduates should know and do at a competent level (Steffy, 1993). KDOE revised the state curriculum and replaced the old standardized testing program with a new performance-based assessment, the Kentucky Instructional Results Information System (KIRIS) that is aligned to the redesigned state curriculum (Kelley & Protsik, 1997). With the establishment of KERA, the legislature poured over $1 billion dollars into education during the first two years of implementation to help pay for sanctions and rewards, site-based school councils for hiring and decision-making, and starting preschool programs (Hoff, 2003).

Kelley and Protsik (1997) conducted a qualitative study to provide information on the rewards and sanctions aspects of KERA. The study involved six award winning schools and examined the role that the rewards and sanctions played in providing incentives for teachers to change their teaching strategies to
improve student learning (Kelley & Protsik, 1997). The authors interviewed both principals and teachers in an attempt to see the motivational effects of KERA. All schools in the study showed student improvements in test scores but they varied in the extent to which improvement strategies were long-term and pervasive (Kelley & Protsik).

Teacher comments and changes in teacher strategies indicated that KERA did motivate teachers to focus on the components of the reform to improve student achievement on assessments. Most of the teachers interviewed were not motivated by the monetary rewards but more motivated by the fear of sanctions. “The promise of rewards tended to be less of a motivator than the threat of public embarrassment that could accompany sanctions” (Kelley & Protsik, 1997, p. 488), but the accountability system did provide a positive motivating force for school improvement through focused, team-based efforts (Kelley & Protsik).

In a second study involving 16 schools in Kentucky, Kelley (1998) also researched the rewards and sanctions program but included both award-winning and nonaward-winning schools to deepen the data. Again, data were found to acknowledge that rewards were a pleasant recognition but not the driving force behind teacher behavior. Kelley went on to state that even though there does not appear to be a direct effect on motivation, the level of attention to KERA along with the level of attention given to the reward status by teachers, parents, stakeholders, and policy makers suggests that there is an indirect effect on motivation.
Kelley (1998) did find distinct differences between the two sets of schools within their organizational characteristics and strategies for achievement of accountability goals. In the most successful schools, curriculum was aligned with the assessment instrument (KIRIS). Principal leadership and focusing on specific goals was evident. The highly skilled staff was found to work collaboratively with leadership to focus on curriculum and instructional programs reinforcing the need for having a “high-quality, focused professional development program for teachers, as well as leadership committed to the accountability goals” (p. 322) to be successful (Kelley).

Elmore and Fuhrman (2001) shared findings from research on accountability systems conducted by the Consortium for Policy Research in Education (CPRE). In examining the system used in Kentucky, CPRE conducted interviews and surveys from both principals and teachers. Elmore and Fuhrman found that teachers valued the satisfaction from the increase in student achievement and the monetary reward. The monetary bonus was less of an incentive than the recognition and student success. The negative outcomes included “increased pressure and stress to improve results, fear of being labeled as a school in decline, and the professional embarrassment, loss of freedom through state-directed assistance or takeovers” (Elmore & Furhman, p. 68).

California

Policy makers in California shifted the focus of educational reform from regulations and processes to student achievement and accountability (Hart & Brownell, 2001). The size and extent of education in California, with 8,000 public
schools of immense geographic and demographic differences, made it difficult to design an accountability system that would have positive effects on the quality of education throughout the state (Hart & Brownell). With declining test scores and increasing dropouts, radical change was needed to restore public confidence in the state’s education system (Alexander, 1994). These changes included a shift from an undemanding course of studies to a richer curriculum for all students; from a fragmented reform to a comprehensive plan; and from an emphasis on inputs to an emphasis on results and accountability (Alexander).

Reform in the 1980s and early 1990s reflected efforts related to curriculum, performance assessments, charter schools and increased professional development opportunities (Hart & Boutwell, 2001). The results of priorities and reform were not clear which led parents, policy makers, educators business and community leaders into discussions. Low scores in both 1992 and 1994 by California students on the National Assessment of Educational Progress compelled legislators to enact reforms focusing on evidence in improved student performance. By 1998, major reforms included reducing class size in grades K through third, developing state standards, adopting new instructional materials and increasing funding to districts (Hart & Brownell).

Significant to the effort to improve student achievement in California were the State Board of Education’s K – 12 core academic content standards in four curriculum areas: language arts, mathematics, social science and science (Hart & Brownell, 2001). The standards identify what students need to know and accomplish at every grade in each of the four areas. Tests aligned with the
standards are being developed for California’s assessment system. A discipline-based subject matter framework clarifies the standards and provides a blueprint for how to organize instruction for maximum learning (Hart & Brownell).

Accountability for school districts and schools is defined in the Public Schools Accountability Act of 1999 and includes three major components (Hart & Brownell, 2001). First, the Academic Performance Index (API) is used to measure and rank school performance, set academic growth targets and monitor progress over time. Second, the Immediate Intervention/Underperforming Schools program provides additional resources to schools, which do not meet growth targets. Third, the Governor’s Performance Award program rewards schools and teachers whose students show high achievement or improvement (Hart & Brownell).

California’s accountability system, like Kentucky’s, used a performance growth approach. California classified schools into categories based on student performance on the SAT-9 exam. California used only one indicator (SAT-9 exam scores) until the other planned indicators were ready to use. Schools were ranked from 1 to 10, with 10 as the highest for each grade span of instruction (elementary, middle, and high) (Ananda & Rabinowitz, 2001).

Like Texas, California reports assessment results by student groups (special education, minority groups, etc), indicating a need for California to close the achievement gap between these groups. Each school also has two sets of rankings showing a school’s relative standing against all schools as well as the schools with similar socioeconomic characteristics (Ananda & Rabinowitz, 2001).
“North Carolina is considered ahead of the curve when it comes to holding schools accountable” (Jonsson, 2002, p. 11). The most recent accountability system in North Carolina was designed to hold schools “Accountable” for the “Basic” skills in reading, math and writing, while giving local districts and schools more “Control” and was thus referred to as the ABCs program of North Carolina (Ladd & Zelli, 2002). This is the fifth major state reform plan in the past decade and the ABCs program has had a major impact on curriculum, instruction, testing and personnel across the state (Jones, Jones, Hardin, et al., 1999). The ABCs of Public Education Plan was signed into law with overwhelming bipartisan support in 1996 and has helped some of the state’s most troubled schools start on the path to reform (Manzo, 1999).

In the State of the State report given by the Department of Public Education in North Carolina it was stated:

Overall, test results for North Carolina’s students in 2002 continue to show the positive impact of on-going educational reforms and innovative accountability initiatives on student achievement in the state’s public schools. The state’s students are continuing to build on recent academic success and are positioned for continued gains in the future. (North Carolina Department of Education, 2004a, p. xi)

The North Carolina Department of Education (2004a) reported that the ABCs focused on: (1) strong accountability with an emphasis on educational standards; (2) curriculum emphasizing the basics; and (3) high amounts of local
control (North Carolina State Department of Education). Initiated in the 1996-1997 school year, the ABCs program became part of a broader reform effort in North Carolina to improve the academic performance of its students (Ladd & Zelli, 2002). The ABCs Program aligned its student assessments with the state’s standard course of study and received attention because of the coherence and sophistication of its value-added design (Ladd & Zelli).

Jones, et al. (1999) reported that the focus on the basics indicated an emphasis on reading, writing and math and could result in science, social studies and the arts taught only if there was extra time left in the school schedule. The local control aspect was to move toward school-based management and have the state be less involved allowing local school boards to be flexible with spending state funds. The exchange was for tighter state control of student achievement. (Jones, et al.).

The ABCs accountability system set growth and performance standards for each elementary, middle and high school across the state. End-of-grade (EOG) and End-of-course (EOC) test results and selected other components were then used to measure a school’s performance and its growth (North Carolina State Board of Education, 2004a). The system from North Carolina differs from other systems in that it has a philosophy based on the desire for all schools to have the chance to meet the accountability standards (thus focusing on growth standards) not just one of looking at the percent of students scoring at a particular proficiency level. By focusing on growth, the ABCs program
encouraged improvement for all schools (North Carolina State Department of Education).

This comprehensive plan to improve student achievement in North Carolina holds schools accountable for the progress of their students. The State Board of Education (SBE) set two types of performance goals for student achievement to use: (1) performance standards; and (2) growth standards. Performance standards refer to the achievement or percent of students’ scores in a particular school that are at or above grade level. Growth standards are the benchmarks set to measure a school’s progress (North Carolina State Department of Education, 2004a).

At the elementary level, the ABCs program holds schools accountable for reading, math and writing. Curriculum-referenced tests or EOG tests in reading and math linked to the state’s standards are given to all students each year in grades 3 through 8. Students in grades 4 and 7 are also tested in the area of writing. At the high school level, EOC tests are given in subjects such as algebra, English, biology and U.S. history (Ladd & Zelli, 2002). The key component of the ABCs program in grades 3 through 8 measures gains for the same students from year to year and represents a value-added measure of school effectiveness, “for example, scores of fourth graders in year $t$ compared to scores of the same group of students when they were in third grade in year $t - 1$” (Ladd & Zelli, p. 499).

Ladd and Zelli (2002) stated two advantages to this approach over other approaches. One is the avoidance of changes in the mixture of students in any
given grade from year to year. Second, that the results for each school can be controlled to be the students who were in the school for a specified period of time. The school will then not be held responsible for the achievement of students who were only in the building for a brief period.

The expected growth for a school is based on: (1) previous performance, (2) statewide average growth; and (3) a statistical adjustment to compare test scores of the same students from one year to the next. The formula generated the expected growth for every school (North Carolina State Department of Education, 2004a). Exemplary growth is that which exceeds the expected growth by amounts specified by the State Board of Education. The ABCs program recognizes schools that meet exemplary or expected growth with various incentives and sanctions those schools falling below the expected growth (North Carolina State Department of Education).

Ladd and Zelli (2002) referred to the growth component as the “innovative and sophisticated part of the accountability framework” (p. 499). State policymakers wanted to see if a school’s students gained a year’s worth of knowledge for a year’s worth of work. Categories for scoring included meeting its expected growth if the average gains of its students were at least as great as the school’s expected growth, given the particular students it served and was deemed exemplary if the students gains exceeded the expected gains by more than 10%. Low – performing schools were assigned to those that meet neither the performance standard of 50% at grade level nor their school specific growth
standard. Schools in which at least 50% of the students scored at grade level or above fell in the no-recognition category (Ladd & Zelli).

During the first year of implementation, the North Carolina State Department of Education dispatched assistance teams to the 15 elementary and middle schools with the most alarming gaps in achievement. Since the start of the 1997-1998 school year, significant progress has taken place (Manzo, 1999). Only one of the targeted schools has not met or exceeded the state’s expectations on tests in reading and math in grades 3 through 8 in 1998. Thirteen were declared exemplary after exceeding the goals for improved student performance that the state set for each school (Manzo). “The progress has state education leaders convinced that this latest effort to improve the Tar Heel State’s 1,997 schools is working and that its tradition of start-and-stop reforms has been halted” (Manzo, pg. 11).

In a study conducted by Ladd and Zelli (2002), elementary principals were surveyed during the summer of 1997 before the first-year results of the program were publicly announced and again during the summer of 1999 after 3 years of experience with the program. The purpose was to see the extent to which the principals reacted in ways consistent with the goals of the state and the extent to which their actions were influenced by characteristics of the schools. The study surveyed issues including standards, alignment of tests with curriculum, and recognition and sanctions. Ladd and Zelli concluded “that a well-designed accountability school-based system of the type implemented in North Carolina..."
can have powerful effects on the behavior of one set of key adults in the education system: school principals" (p. 521).

In comparing actions the surveyed principals engaged in to improve instruction, principals reported developing curricular programs focused on reading and math, spending more time on instruction with teachers, and encouraging time on test-taking skills. Large increases in all areas were revealed from the surveyed principals from 1997 to 1999 (Ladd & Zelli, 2002). By 1999, 70% or more of the principals were engaged in all the above areas. Ladd and Zelli concluded that the ABCs program was a powerful incentive program and had altered the behavior of school principals.

Jones, et al. (1999) conducted a study to research how teachers viewed the ABCs program, how it affected instruction, and the extent of instructional time used for teaching test-taking strategies. A total of 236 teachers responded to the survey from across the state. Approximately two-thirds of those responding indicated spending more time on reading and writing instruction, with over half reporting spending more time on math instruction. Jones, et al. concluded that assessment does drive instruction, at least according to the time teachers devoted instruction to these areas. Eighty percent of the teachers in the study spent more that 20% of their entire instruction time teaching students test preparation skills. Sixty-seven percent of the teachers indicated that they had changed their teaching methods as a result of the ABCs program. Even though the types of changes were less clear-cut, the changes suggested that the teachers were adapting to meet the new demands of testing (Jones, et al., 1999).
In the 2000-2001 school year, the ABCs program was adjusted in response to input from schools, actions of the State Board of Education (SBE), and the results from previous years of the program (North Carolina Department of Education, 2004a). Two new categories of reporting were added to include Schools of Progress and Priority Schools. Priority Schools denoted schools that may profit from voluntary assistance provided by the SBE. Schools of Progress indicated a school where expected growth was made and at least 60% of its students’ scores were at or above expected growth (North Carolina Department of Education).

Mike Ward, State School Superintendent discussed the trends concerning the effects of North Carolina’s reform on the racial achievement gap in its districts (Simmons, 2003). The percentage of African-American students who passed the state’s reading and math tests in the spring of 2003 jumped from 57 percent to 67 percent. American Indian and Hispanic students also saw large increases, having passing scores above 70 percent in both groups (Simmons, 2003). These successes did not appear to come at the expense of the white and Asian groups. Although the programs in the varying school districts may be different, the underlying philosophy remains the same: “start early, test often, remain focused” (Simmons, p.1).

The purpose of accountability programs and policies is to change the attitudes and behaviors of teachers, students and other education stakeholders in constructive ways (Amrein & Berliner, 2002). Recent performances of North Carolina students on state tests and national tests suggest that such changes
are occurring. The swiftness of the changes needs to be accelerated, but unmistakably, the state is pressing in the right direction (North Carolina Department of Education, 2004a).

More than 43 percent of North Carolina schools are Schools of Excellence or Schools of Distinction, the state’s two highest recognition categories, according to the 2001-2002 ABCs accountability results released and approved by the State Board of Education today. This shows that the state’s accountability model, just entering its seventh year, is working as planned and increasing the number of students performing at grade level or better…. (North Carolina Department of Education, 2004b, p.1)

Federal Reform

Less than a year after taking office, President George W. Bush put in motion his comprehensive reform, signifying a fundamental change in the federal government’s role in the nation’s K-12 education system (Michelau & Schreve, 2002). The education plan proposed, passed and signed into law by President Bush reflects a growing political consensus that the federal government should step up the pressure on states and school districts to improve student achievement (Robelen & Fine, 2001). Signed into law by President Bush on January 8, 2002, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) signified the most sweeping change to the Elementary & Secondary Education Act (ESEA) since it was enacted in 1965 (Georgia Department of Education, 2004b). No Child Left Behind is a law that operates on one basic assumption: that every child - regardless of income, gender, race, ethnicity, or disability - can learn, and that
every child deserves to learn (Georgia Department of Education, p.1). The
passage of NCLB is aimed towards establishing “(1) greater accountability for
results; (2) more flexibility for schools, school districts, and states in how they use
federal funds; (3) a wider range of education choices; and (4) an emphasis on
research-based teaching methods” (Aldridge, 2003, p. 45).

Four basic education reform principles based on President Bush’s
priorities for America’s schools were developed in the NCLB (Rajala, 2003). First,
the act requires states to set high standards of achievement and develop a
system of accountability to measure results, focusing on reading and math.
Second, the act offers greater flexibility and local control by placing more
decision-making at the local level (Rajala). “One of the most significant changes
brought about by No Child Left Behind is an increased responsibility for state and
local leaders to direct federal funds and to be held accountable for what results
from that investment” (Bailey, 2002, p. 4). Third, the act provides parents with
more choices if their child attends low-performing schools. Fourth, the act places
emphasis on teaching methods that work and are research-based to ensure that
all children in school are reading on grade level by the third grade as well as
strengthens teacher quality (Rajala). Data from student assessments combined
with other indicators can provide a more comprehensive analysis of student
achievement. Educators can then track progress and direct resources to weaker
areas (Bailey).

The NCLB plan called for more testing including high-stakes testing of
every child in the United States in grades 3 through 8 in math and reading. Both
Democrats and Republicans endorsed high-stakes testing policies receiving bipartisan support. Annual testing of every child along with the addition of rewards and penalties for their performance, according to the President, will reform education (Amrein & Berliner, 2002).

By building on its foundation, NCLB aims to achieve the distinguished goal that by the 2013-2014 school year all students will have a quality education (Georgia Department of Education, 2004b). Achievement of this goal is challenging, as the rigor of tests, content and performance standards differ from state to state and each state has a different point of beginning (Aldridge, 2003). To meet the goal of 100% proficiency, Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) has to be defined by each state requiring a set of performance goals that establishes minimum levels of performance, based on student performance on state tests, that schools, districts and the State as a whole must meet within a specific time frame stated in NCLB (Georgia Department of Education).

As states, districts, and school leaders deal with the full impact of the No Child Left Behind Act, their level of anxiety has risen over how to meet NCLB requirements (Sanders, 2003). In the fall of 2002, the Education Commission of the States (ECS) began a survey of all states in an attempt to conclude how states were progressing with implementation of the law. ECS found that most states and local districts were strong in developing accountability systems, but there is still a significant gap between NCLB requirements and the capacity to meet them (Sanders).
The objective of NCLB was that, through accountability, schools, districts
and states be responsible for students’ achievement and address the
performance gap between majority and the minority students (Michelau &
Shreve, 2002). This new act went farther than the 1994 Improving America’s
Schools Act, a system of standards and testing for Title I students, it was built on.
Two major aspects of NCLB included accountability and testing requirements
that were based on the Texas model of standards and testing. According to
NCLB, states must adopt rigorous academic standards and test students in
reading and math in grades 3 through 8 (Michelau & Shreve).

One of the more important and demanding aspects of NCLB, testing can
show where a problem lies but does not offer a way to fix it (Michelau & Shreve,
2002). Michelau and Shreve stated challenges associated with testing to include
(1) cost – in 2001, states together spent $400 million to test students; (2)
comparison – each state establishes its own guidelines so they should not be
compared; (3) contrariness – testing, performance requirements and federally
mandated sanctions may perverse incentives to lower standards instead of
raising them; and (4) consequences for special education – may have more
referrals to accommodate testing.

Education Reform in Georgia

A+ Education Reform Act of 2000

The A+ Education Reform Act of 2000 or House Bill 1187 (HB 1187)
officially went into effect on July 1, 2000. Governor Roy Barnes’ plan for
improving the Georgia education system had a direct impact on school
accountability and incorporated more complex and extensive dimensionalities (Wright, 2001). The plan called for class-size reductions, new policies to help schools deal with students, and closer ties between higher education and preK–12 schools (Archer, 2000). The A+ Education Reform Act of 2000 included a variety of policies with the most significant dealing with accountability through mandated standardized testing to ensure all students receive quality instruction and achieve at their highest goals. It also created the Office of Accountability to issue school report cards, and a system of rating schools as either high or low performing based on student achievement (Ringue, 2002; O’Neal, 2000).

The creation of local school councils (Code Section 20-2-85, 20-3-86) was intended to bring parents and the community together with school administrators and teachers to promote mutual respect for all those involved and to communicate concerns and ideas for school improvement. The reduction of the pupil-teacher ratio (Code Section 20-2-161) affects the teacher workforce and school facilities. Program areas tailored or changed included the creation of the Early Intervention Program (Code Section 20-2-153) and the Remedial Education Program (Code Section 20-2-184).

Principals were required for certification renewal (Code Section 20-2-200) to display proficiency in technology. Principals were also required to provide professional development focused on improving student achievement (Code Section 20-2-201). Principals were expected to offer an opportunity for all teachers for staff development on curriculum alignment related to mandated tests
and disaggregated student data to help identify academic weaknesses according to subtests (Code Section 20-2-181).

The Office of Education Accountability (OEA) was developed to direct the state assessment program (Code Section 20-14-25, 20-14-26). The OEA reported outcomes for each school in the form of ratings from “A” to “F” (Code Section 20-14-33). The OEA also issued financial awards to schools that achieve a grade of “A” or “B” as defined by A+ Education Reform Act of 2000 (Code Section 20-14-38) and sanctions to schools receiving a grade of “D” or “F” (Code Section 20-14-41).

The increase of student assessment was recognized by policy makers. (Code Section 20-2-281). State mandated testing in reading, language arts and math have to be administered annually in grades 1 through 8 along with science and social studies in grades 3 through 8. Students in grade 11 have been required to pass curriculum-based assessments for graduation. In addition, the State Board of Education has been in the process of developing and implementing end-of-course assessments for students in grades 9 through 12 for all core subjects (Code Section 20-20-281).

Quality Basic Education: QBE

The last major reform effort in Georgia occurred in 1985 with the $2 billion Quality Basic Education Act (QBE) and represented a “major leap forward for a state that traditionally had languished near the bottom of educational effort and quality” (Wohlstetter, 1994, p. 137). The QBE Act was designed to address local
school districts’ authority and leadership deficiencies as well as inadequate student performance (Wohlstetter). Governor Joe Frank Harris’ Task Force on Education led to the passage without a dissenting vote. The reform law carried a price of $231 million for the first year and also made provisions to phase in the program over four years a budget of $700 million in 1990 (Pipho, 1986).

With the enactment of QBE, Georgia became one of the first states to legislate school reform measures (Weller, 1996). Following the publication of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983, QBE was initiated to answer the national call for educational excellence. Even though it had minimal input from educators, it was a “regulatory, top-down reform strategy requiring uniformity in Georgia public schools through prescriptive and often contradictory policies” (Weller, p.65).

Key components of QBE involved curriculum, student and teacher assessment, and teacher certification (Wohlstetter, 1994). With the passage of QBE, the state was required to develop statewide learning objectives for elementary grades and for secondary subject areas. The Quality Core Curriculum (QCC) was adopted in 1988 by the Georgia board of education and then adopted by local districts (Wohlstetter). The new law addressed testing for students. It included a requirement for a school readiness test in kindergarten, criterion referenced gate test for entering grades 4 and 9, and a high school graduation test (Pipho, 1986). Both new and veteran teachers were subjected to rigorous testing and observations through the Teacher Certification Test and the Teacher Professional Assessment Instrument (Wohlstetter).
Summary

Researchers have revealed that since *A Nation at Risk*, federal and state policies for greater school accountability have been rising and with stronger accountability, the role of principal has been impacted. For schools to be successful, changes must take place in the structure of how decisions are made, in the instructional strategies used as well as collaboration among all stakeholders. Researchers have revealed that the role of principal today is much more complex and demanding due to the changes now taking place in the education system due to the accountability movement.

Both federal and state mandates are guiding educational strategies and decisions made daily by school leaders. Researchers have shown that the principal can play a key role in the effectiveness of a school. Effective principals are necessary in realizing the goals of successful reform implementation as well as explaining and carrying out these mandates to all those involved.

As evidenced through data the researchers disclosed, states have been and are continuing to go through a large amount of education reform. The data revealed by researchers in various studies from states leading the way in reform show both positive and negative aspects to the changes. Georgia’s principals have been dealing with its newest education reform, the *A+ Education Reform Act of 2000* since its passage on July 1, 2000. Areas of this reform that principals have been engaged in include alignment of class sizes, increased student assessment, school councils, local professional development, school report cards, and a sanction and reward system.
At one time, principals and teachers could fulfill the demands of accountability simply by working intensely and following standards. Today’s accountability movement emphasizes results. Virtually all states, including Georgia, are not only setting more demanding expectations but also changing the focus from input to results. School leaders must now not only do well but demonstrate this to school board members, parents, and state and federal leaders.

The following tables report information on the following issues found in the review of literature: 1) role of principal; 2) role of testing in education reform; 3) role of state report cards; 4) role of rewards and sanctions in education reform; 5) North Carolina’s ABCs accountability program; 6) role of principal and local school councils.
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<tr>
<td>Richardson, Short, Prickett &amp; Flanigan (1991)</td>
<td>Research synthesis to review reform efforts in school leadership</td>
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<td>Because the obstacles to effective principalship are indicative of larger, fundamental problems, interrelationships in school operation must be considered.</td>
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| Christenson (1993) | Examines the implications for change in the role of principal when a school moves from a traditional model to a specific restructured model | Traditional schools/Accelerated schools | Accelerated schools process/critical incident technique | • Role of principal changes as schools change  
• Role changes from a managerial leader to a transformational/facilitative leader |
| Leithwood, Jantzi, Sillins, & Dart (1992) | Examines the relationship between school restructuring and school leadership | Sample of British Columbia elementary schools, six lead schools in implementing the Primary Program | Quantitative and qualitative design/survey and case studies | • School leaders had direct effects on school goals  
• School leadership did not have significant direct effects on student outcomes |
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<td>Archibald &amp; Porter (1990)</td>
<td>Analysis of roles of mandated testing in education reform</td>
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<td>• Testing and reform are both complicated topics.</td>
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<td>• Establishing boundaries for testing is not always clear-cut.</td>
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<td>• Testing played an important role in reform, but is not as potent a policy</td>
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<td>instrument as many believe.</td>
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<td>as defined by ABCs program.</td>
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<td>• Reading, math and writing instruction time has increased since</td>
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<td>implementation of ABCs.</td>
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<td>Jones, Jones, Hardin, Chapman, Yarbrough, &amp; Davis (1999)</td>
<td>Examines the impact of testing on teachers and students in North Carolina public school systems</td>
<td>Certified teachers in 16 elementary schools in five school districts across North Carolina 236 participants</td>
<td>Survey to describe their instruction and how it had changed since the ABCs accountability program was implemented</td>
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<td>French &amp; Bobbett (1994)</td>
<td>To analyze and compare report cards in the Southeastern states</td>
<td>11 Southeastern states</td>
<td>Analyzed all report cards for similarities and differences in five categories:</td>
<td>• Procedures for analysis are not consistent from state to state.</td>
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<td>1) instruments used to measure student performance; 2) student outcomes; 3)</td>
<td>• Few characteristics impact student academic achievement.</td>
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<td>levels of outcome data reported; 4) school and community factors reported;</td>
<td>• State report cards are useful tool for improvement but their potential is not being reached.</td>
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<td>5) statistical procedures used.</td>
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<td>French &amp; Bobbett (1995)</td>
<td>Comparison of report cards/profiles currently used in the Eastern United</td>
<td>19 Southern and</td>
<td>Analyzed all report cards for similarities and differences in five categories</td>
<td>• State report cards portray school districts and schools in a variety of ways but relationships between student outcomes and other</td>
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<td>States Summarization of the commonalities and differences found in</td>
<td>Eastern States</td>
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<td>PURPOSE</td>
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<td>DESIGN/ANALYSIS</td>
<td>OUTCOMES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kelley (1998)</td>
<td>Examines the implementation of the Kentucky school-based performance award program</td>
<td>16 elementary, middle and high schools</td>
<td>Qualitative study; interviewing the principal and a sample of teachers in each sample school</td>
<td>• Distinct differences between award- and nonaward-winning schools.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Combination of rewards, sanctions and strong developmental interventions is an effective way to improve poorly performing schools.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Teachers are motivated to avoid sanctions and the negative publicity and have a desire to see students achieve.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STUDY</td>
<td>PURPOSE</td>
<td>PARTICIPANTS</td>
<td>DESIGN/ANALYSIS</td>
<td>OUTCOMES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Ladd & Zelli (2002) | Examine the responses of principals to the ABCs program in specific areas: 1) program areas; 2) changes in incentive structure; 3) changes in work environment; 4) changes in tools; 5) actions taken by principal; 6) background questions | Stratified random sample of North Carolina elementary schools in 1997 and 1999                                           | Quantitative Survey by telephone to principals | - Well-designed accountability school-based system that can have powerful effects on the behavior of one set of key adults in the education system  
- Principals have redirected resources to reading and math.  
- Principals have placed a new focus on low-performing students.  
- Only 50% of principals viewed EOG tests as a good measure of child’s mastery of curriculum. |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STUDY</th>
<th>PURPOSE</th>
<th>PARTICIPANTS</th>
<th>DESIGN/ANALYSIS</th>
<th>OUTCOMES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Naftchi-Ardebili, Mueller, Vallina, & Warwick (1992) | Investigated Chicago’s principals’ and school councils perceptions of the principalship under school reform | Elementary and high schools in Chicago | Surveys and interviews with principals and school council leaders | • Principals’ roles and responsibilities have been greatly expanded  
• Principals’ involvement in instructional activities have been reduced due to new demands  
• Most principals’ share decision-making with their LSCs |
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Accountability seems to be the hottest word in primary and secondary education at the present time (Finn, 2002). In the past, the public seemed satisfied with the job educators were doing so accountability was not a major issue. The demand for accountability arose from the knowledge that something was wrong and the public was discontent with the educational system and its results (Finn). Georgia educators have now been mandated to verify effective schools and student achievement through the A+ Education Reform Act of 2000 (Georgia Department of Education, 2004a). According to Finn, this approach is a popular form of education accountability by government. “The government will stipulate what children are supposed to learn, test to see whether they’ve learned it, and impose consequences on students, educators, and schools depending on the outcome” (p.87).

Introduction

Even though states, including Georgia, have not reaped the full benefit of testing and accountability, progress is being made in identifying effective and efficient practices of accountability (Peterson, 2003). Finn and Kanstoroom (2001) suggest that many states have weak accountability movements. Only five states – Alabama, California, North Carolina, South Carolina and Texas make the honor roll having strong mandated accountability movements (Finn & Kanstoroom). Twenty-four states, one of which is Georgia, have much work to do
to catch up with the five leading states (Finn & Kanstoroom). Peterson concluded that:

Strong accountability means a state employs report cards and ratings of schools, rewards successful schools, has authority to reconstitute or make major change to failing schools, and exercises such authority. Solid standards are clear, measurable, comprehensive, and rigorous. (p. 316)

School reform continues into 2000 with changing curriculum, teaching strategies, standards implementation, accountability models and more. (Tirozzi, 2000). As principals in Georgia attempt to meet the challenges facing them through mandated reform, they must do so under intense pressure created by the need to meet all goals successfully (Ferrandino, 2001). Principals are held accountable for achievements from students often with their jobs hanging in the balance (Ferrandino).

“Conspicuously absent from the reform agenda however, is the important leadership role of the principal” (Tirozzi, pg. 68). Policy makers may disseminate educational policies and preach their merits, but the policies are pointless without strong leadership to implement them in schools where the teaching and learning take place (Tirozzi). The importance of principals to school success makes it vital to examine the principal’s role more carefully (Kelley & Peterson, 2002).

With the current emphasis on mandated accountability movements, it is imperative for both educators and policy makers to study information related to the implementation of accountability movements (Peterson, 2003). The
researcher gathered data from existing elementary principals throughout the state related to job perceptions after implementation of the A+ Education Reform Act of 2000. This data can be beneficial to the researcher in studying the mandated accountability movement in relation to its intention, which is improving student achievement. Similarities and differences among the data gathered from the elementary school principals, as it relates to any role changes due to the education reform, will be informative to future decision making and planning.

Research Questions

The overarching question for this study: Has the implementation of A+ Education Reform Act of 2000 effected the role perceptions of Georgia elementary school principals? The researcher addressed the following research questions during the study:

1. What are the present perceptions of Georgia elementary principals since the full implementation of A+ Education Reform Act of 2000?
2. Have Georgia elementary principals changed their roles based on their perceptions of A+ Education Reform Act of 2000 from 2002-2004?
3. Do Georgia elementary principals’ perceptions of the A+ Education Reform Act of 2000 vary by age, gender, level of education, length of service, or geographical location of the school?
Procedures

The researcher replicated a previous study on the A+ Education Reform Act of 2000 that was carried out by Wright in 2001. Gall, Borg and Gall have stated:

Replication is one of the most powerful tools of science. If constructs are given clear operational definitions, other researchers can repeat the first researcher's investigation. Replication allows science to be self-correcting. If subsequent research yields the same results as the first investigation, confidence in the hypothesis is strengthened. If different results are obtained, the researchers will need to determine whether there was error in the first investigation. Another possibility is that the subsequent investigations changed the conditions of the first study. (p.33)

Replication of a study may not literally repeat the conditions of the first study but can duplicate elements and extend inquiry into new domains (Gall, Borg, Gall, 1996). The replication of Wright’s study on the role perceptions of elementary school principals on the implementation of the A+ Education Reform Act of 2000 allowed the researcher to study new data gathered and compare it to the data collected by Wright.

Research Design

The descriptive survey approach was used as the research design of this study. The survey design for this study was chosen for several reasons. First, Wright (2001) established baseline data concerning role perceptions of elementary school principals during a previous study on the implementation of the A+ Education Reform Act of 2000. Since the researcher was to compare
baseline data to new data, the only way to make a valid comparison was to utilize the same instrument to collect the new data. Second, the survey approach was a basic and direct way of soliciting principals for needed data of the research (Creswell, 1994). Principals responded to the questionnaire at their own pace and convenience without being exposed to pressure as experienced in interviews (Creswell).

Population

The researcher identified all the elementary school principals from the Georgia Public Education Directory (Georgia Department of Education, 2002). The current 180 school districts in the state of Georgia were involved to gather information of elementary school principals. Only elementary schools that house pre-kindergarten through third or fifth grade and/or kindergarten through third or fifth grade were included in the population. The population consisted of the 1,225 elementary school principals as reported from the Georgia Department of Education. The elementary schools were those included according to the written information provided by each system and listed in the Georgia Public Schools Directory (Georgia Department of Education, 2002).

Sample

The researcher used a random sampling method without replacement to achieve a representative sample of elementary school principals since a list of the target population was available (Gall, Borg & Gall, 1996). This ensured that each individual would have an equal probability of being selected from the population and the sample would be representative of the total population (Creswell, 1994). Names of elementary school principals in the Georgia Public
Education Directory were selected to use for the sample. The sampling method was without replacement. The systematic system of sampling was used by first dividing the list of elementary school principals by the number needed for the sample. The researcher then selected a random number smaller than the number arrived at by the division and then used that number to select every name thereafter from the list by starting in a random place on the list (Gay, 1995; Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996). From the current population of 1,225 elementary school principals, 400 principals were selected for usage in the study. The sample size was larger than the recommended size of approximately 300 from a total population size of over 1200 (Smith, 1980).

The survey was then mailed to the random sample of these elementary principals throughout the state of Georgia including participants from all varieties of geographic and economic locations. Generalizations from this study were then made to the entire population of the state.

Instrumentation

A survey designed and used during a previous study on the A+ Education Reform Act of 2000 established baseline data on elementary principals’ role perceptions during education reform in Georgia (see Appendix A). Prior to this study, several surveys had been done investigating principals’ self-perceptions of their roles (Ringue, 2002; Smith, 1995; Tripses, 1998). However, no previous study highlighted perceptions of specific features of Georgia’s reform law with respect to elementary principals until Wright conducted the study in 2001. Wright designed and validated a survey to exclusively explore self-perceptions of elementary principals as a result of the implementation of the A+ Education
Reform Act of 2000 in Georgia. The researcher revised the survey sections that addressed unique parts of the A+ Education Reform Act of 2000 and principals’ role perceptions after its implementation excluding the responses related to the support principals received during the implementation stage of the A+ Education Reform Act of 2000 (see Appendix B).

The researcher employed the survey developed, validated and used by Wright in her research study on the implementation of the A+ Education Reform Act of 2000 (Wright, 2001). Permission was obtained from Wright to use her instrument (see Appendix C). The survey consisting of eleven quantitative and five qualitative questions addressed whether elementary principals felt that specific components of the A+ Education Reform Act of 2000 that they were accountable for carrying out were valuable and how the implementation had influenced their daily job of operating a school. The survey was tested for face validity, content validity and reliability (Wright, 2001). The survey included demographic information and quantitative questions with a Likert scale. The demographic variables allowed the researcher to compare survey responses.

Open-ended questions on particular aspects of the reform were coded to allow the researcher to study more personal reactions to the implementation process and role perceptions (Creswell, 1994). These open-ended questions helped to clarify perceptions that were revealed through the survey responses. This allowed principals the opportunity to relate in their own words how dealing with educational reform had affected their duties as a building level administrator (Creswell).
Data Collection

The researcher had obtained permission from Wright to use the survey for the new study. To complete this study, permission was then requested from the Georgia Southern University Institutional Review Board (IRB). Upon receipt of approval from the IRB, the survey instrument was then mailed out to the random sample of elementary principals throughout the state of Georgia on November 8, 2004. Each survey on the randomized list of principals was assigned a number to assist the researcher in keeping track of the number of responses and those that have been returned (Creswell, 1994).

The survey instrument accompanied a letter that stated the purpose of the survey and explained the necessity of responses from those receiving a survey. The letter clearly explained the format of the survey and procedures for the participants. A self-addressed stamped envelope was also included for easy return to the researcher. The randomized numbers corresponding to the list of selected principals was printed on each envelope. This enabled the researcher to contact those principals not responding to the survey. A follow-up postcard was sent requesting a reply to the survey after approximately 2 weeks from the first mailing. The purpose of the postcard was to encourage attention to the survey and emphasize the importance of the study and that a response would be of great value. A second mailing was sent out on December 1, 2004 so that the targeted sample size may be closely obtained for this type of research study (Creswell, 1994). A third mailing was sent out to those principals that had not replied to increase the number or respondents. The third mailing was sent out on
December 31, 2004. The researcher received 188 surveys from the sample of 400 principals for a return rate of 47%.

Data Analysis

When the surveys were received, the qualitative and quantitative information was analyzed. One-way ANOVA was used to analyze the research questions and provide a way of studying the effect of dependent and two or more independent variables (de Vaus, 2001). This method was used to “determine the correlation between a criterion variable and some combination of two or more predictor variables” (Gall, Borg & Gall, 1996). Four personal and demographic variables were considered predictor variables. One-way analysis was used to determine relationships between groups’ variances on demographic variables.

The statistical software program SPSS – version 11.0 (SPSS, 2001) was utilized to analyze the quantitative data. Means and standard deviations were among the descriptive statistics resulting from the SPSS analysis. The selected components from A+ Education Reform Act of 2000 along with the demographic variables (length of service, projected length of service, age, gender, educational level and school location) were analyzed using the correlations and one-way ANOVA components of SPSS (SPSS, 2001). The analysis provided the researcher with the knowledge of whether any differences were found among specific groups of principals and if those differences were statistically significant (de Vaus, 2001).

The research questions were addressed in this study by the survey items using the Likert scale. To determine the principals’ general role perceptions, a Likert four-point scale that ranged from strongly agree to strongly disagree was
used. The researcher revised the original survey from a five-point scale to a four-point scale removing the neutral “don’t know” value. Data relating to the principals’ perceptions on specific components of the A+ Education Reform Act of 2000 were determined using a scale ranging from valuable to no value. The researcher revised the original survey used in Wright’s study from a three-point scale to a four-point scale so that both Likert scales would be a four-point scale. The researcher also removed the support section from the survey because that portion was not part of this study. The statistical software program SPSS – version 11.0 (SPSS, 2001) was used to analyze the data qualitatively. The survey items were analyzed statistically for mean, standard deviations, and frequencies (de Vaus, 2001).

The researcher analyzed the open-ended questions by looking for patterns, themes and categories within the responses. Once themes and categories were established and the responses tallied for frequencies within categories, a third party expert verified thematic patterns in the data gathered from the responses. Using both quantitative and qualitative data, the researcher was able to more fully understand and report the perceptions of elementary principals during educational reform (Creswell, 1994).

Table 7 noted the research questions, survey items and the item analysis that was used to answer the questions along with the data analysis used in answering each research question.

Tables showing all results of the analysis were established to show how the respondents answered the survey items. Text was also written to further show how principals responded including descriptive statistics, frequencies and
variances according to demographics. The researcher stated the major findings from the data investigating every research questions.

Table 7

Alignment of Research Questions to Survey Items and Item Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Survey Items</th>
<th>Item Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Data from questions 7 – 11 was used to determine present perceptions of elementary principals as they relate to the A+ Education Reform Act of 2000.</td>
<td>Descriptive statistics were run on SPSS to find mean, standard deviation, frequencies and percentages for each question. The same analysis was done for each specific component in question 11.</td>
<td>Mean and standard deviation for each question was converted from Wright’s scale to Newton’s scale for comparison of baseline data to new data. Data was compared for increases and/or decreases.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Comparison of baseline data to new data from items 7 – 11.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 7 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Survey Items</th>
<th>Item Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Items 1, 3, 4, 5, 6</td>
<td>One-way ANOVA was used to determine if scores varied significantly by demographic variables.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Summary

The researcher discovered through this study the role perceptions of Georgia elementary school principals as they related to specific components of the A+ Education Reform Act of 2000. Several demographic variables including length of service, age, educational level, and gender were used to examine and compare responses from various groups of respondents. Their contributions helped to deepen the baseline data from a previous study and provided unique feedback as it related to the state of Georgia. Comparison of the two sets of data helped to determine any differences in role perceptions that existed after full implementation of the A+ Education Reform Act of 2000.

The study was conducted using both qualitative and quantitative methods. A survey method was used in order to gather responses from a large number of elementary principals across the state. Using a random sampling method helped to allow the researcher to generalize the data to the entire population. Also, open-ended questions were analyzed for thematic patterns in the data.
Elementary principals had the opportunity to help identify how, if at all, their role as building leaders has transformed since implementing the A+ Education Reform Act of 2000 as it related to their own environments. This invaluable data of instituting state mandated reform can offer information to policy makers, Georgia State Department of Education members, legislators and other colleagues as they look at updating current reforms.

Knowing that educators in the state of Georgia want a reform system that is both effective and efficient, principals were a rich source of information for policy makers, legislators and colleagues. Georgia elementary principals were able to offer contributions to research on the reform efforts in Georgia as they relate to role perceptions of being the school principal.
CHAPTER 4
REPORT OF DATA AND DATA ANALYSIS

Successful execution of change proposed by national, state or local directives has been imputed to the principal as the leader of the school organization. The A+ Education Reform Act of 2000 originated on July 1, 2000 and Georgia elementary school principals began the task of implementing comprehensive reform. Specific components of the movement pertinent to elementary school principals involved the organizational structure of remedial programs, additional student assessment to evaluate student performance, rewards and sanctions to accompany grades for overall school performance, and changes within the groups involved in decision making to improve student performance.

Introduction

The researcher proposed to investigate the perceptions of Georgia elementary principals regarding specific components of the A+ Education Reform Act of 2000 in relationship to their roles as building administrators. The survey given to a random sample of principals included four significant areas: (1) personal and demographic information, (2) principals’ general perceptions of the components of the A+ Education Reform Act of 2000, (3) principals’ evaluation of specific components of the A+ Education Reform Act of 2000, and (4) four open-ended questions meant to obtain opinions about principals’ roles, changes in Georgia’s administration along with suggestions for amending the A+ Education Reform Act of 2000. The survey was mailed to 400 Georgia elementary school principals, who were randomly selected from the
Georgia Public Schools Directory, published by the Georgia State Department of Education (2002). Of the 400 surveys mailed out, the researcher received 188 surveys from the sample group, for a return rate of 47%.

Data analysis was conducted employing the SPSS – version 11.0 (SPSS, 2002) computer program. Data analysis utilizing SPSS generated descriptive statistics including frequencies, means, and standard deviations. SPSS was also used to compare baseline data gathered in a previous study. The researcher analyzed the qualitative answers by developing categories for the responses according to each response and placing responses within a particular category. This helped the researcher study the similarities and differences among the responses. The researcher had a third party expert verify categories within the responses from the open-ended questions.

Research Questions

The overarching question for this study: Has the implementation of A+ Education Reform Act of 2000 effected the role perceptions of Georgia elementary school principals? The researcher addressed the following research questions during the study:

1. What are the present perceptions of Georgia elementary principals since the full implementation of A+ Education Reform Act of 2000?
2. Have Georgia elementary principals changed their roles based on their perceptions of A+ Education Reform Act of 2000 from 2002 - 2004?
3. Do Georgia elementary principals’ perceptions of the A+ Education Reform Act of 2000 vary by age, gender, level of education, length of service, or geographical location of the school?
Research Design

The descriptive survey approach was used as the research design of this study. The researcher replicated a previous study on role perceptions of elementary school principals after implementing the A+ Education Reform Act of 2000. The prior study was completed in 2001. Principals were selected through a random sampling process and were mailed a survey on role perceptions following the implementation of the A+ Education Reform Act of 2000. Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected and analyzed by the researcher.

Demographic Profile of the Respondents

From the 1,225 elementary school principals in Georgia, 400 principals were randomly selected to take part in this study. Of the 400 principals that were mailed surveys, 188 chose to respond and return surveys. With a total of 188 surveys received, a 47% return rate was established for the study.

Section one of the survey included six questions principals completed on personal and professional information. Table 8 represents data from respondents regarding the demographic data from questions 1 – 6 on the survey.

Table 8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Years Experience</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>188</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.5 – 3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>36.7</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 – 6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>24.5</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 – 10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>17.0</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>21.8</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 8 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>188</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Up to 35</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36 – 45</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>22.9</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46 – 55</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>54.3</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56+</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13.8</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>none given</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>188</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>37.2</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>62.8</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational Level</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>188</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master's</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational Specialist</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>64.9</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ed.D/Ph.D.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>23.4</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20.7</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suburban</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>37.8</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>41.0</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Principals reported that they had served as principals from one-half of a year to 26 years. The largest percentage of respondents revealed they had the least experience as principals reporting from .5 to 3 years experience (36.7%) with over half of the respondents reporting 6 years or less of experience as elementary principals (61.2%).
The age of the respondents was separated into five categories by the researcher. The “up to 35” category was assigned group “1”, “36-45” group “2”, “46-55” group “3”, “56+” group “4”, and “none given” group 5 since several respondents chose not to reveal their age.

The largest percentage of respondents was in the “46-55” age category, with 54.3% in this age range. The smallest percentage of those responding represented the youngest age group with 8% in the “up to 35” age category. The second most frequented age group was 22.9% in the “36-45” age category. The “55+” age category reported 13.8% of the respondents.

Principals responding were classified by gender as group 1 (male) and group 2 (female). More female principals responded than male principals with almost two-thirds of those responding being in the female category. Georgia elementary principals responding were comprised of 62.2% in the female category and 36.7% in the male category.

The educational level of principals was distributed into three categories with group “1” given to Master’s, group “2” to Specialist Degree, and group “3” to Ed.D/Ph.D. The educational level most frequently reported by the principals responding was Educational Specialist with 64.6% of the respondents falling in this category. The two remaining levels included 23.4% of the principals holding a doctorate degree and 11.2% of the principals holding the Master’s degree.

The last question in the first section of demographics related to the type of community the school served. The data for this question listed in table 2 was assigned groups “1”, “2” and “3” respectively to the three types of communities.
schools serve. Group “1” was given to urban schools, group “2” to suburban schools, group “3” to rural schools.

More of the principals responding reported to work in schools found in rural communities (41.0%). However, this was only slightly larger than the group working in suburban schools with 37.8%. The urban community was represented by 20.7% of those responding.

Findings

The purpose of this study was to address the perceptions of elementary principals within the state of Georgia after implementing educational reform. After sending 400 surveys to a random sample of elementary principals across the state and receiving 188 responses, the researcher analyzed data on principals’ general perceptions of the A+ Education Reform Act of 2000 as well as specific components.

*Principals’ General Perceptions of the A+ Education Reform Act of 2000*

Four survey questions in the second section assessed principals’ general perceptions concerning the A+ Education Reform Act of 2000 and helped answer the first research question: 1) What are the present perceptions of Georgia elementary principals since the full implementation of A+ Education Reform Act of 2000? Each of the four questions presented in the survey was in line with issues principals will encounter, are currently encountering, or have encountered as a result of implementing the A+ Education Reform Act of 2000. Values ranging from “1” designating “strongly disagree” to “4” designating “strongly agree” were provided as response choices.
Table 9 represents the descriptive statistics of elementary principals’ responses to the degree of agreement to general perceptions of the A+ Education Reform Act of 2000 as well as the mean of the total perception of all four statements.

Table 9

**Principals’ General Perceptions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Components</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Perceptions</td>
<td>184</td>
<td>2.25</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>3.29</td>
<td>.354</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of understanding of A+ Education Reform Act of 2000</td>
<td>188</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.37</td>
<td>.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skills for Conflict with School Council</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.45</td>
<td>.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Decision-Making/Improving Student Performance</td>
<td>187</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.74</td>
<td>.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High-Stakes Testing</td>
<td>187</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.59</td>
<td>.72</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Elementary principals agreed strongly that involving teachers in decision making would improve student achievement. Principals responded with either agree or strongly agree for the statement concerning this area and had a mean score of 3.74. Principals responded from strongly disagreed to strongly agreed with the belief that using High-stakes testing would improve student performance and had a mean of 2.59. Overall mean of general perceptions of the A+ Education Reform Act of 2000 showed principals agreed with the process (3.29).
The frequencies and descriptive statistics of elementary principals’ responses to Question 7 in the second section of the survey, which referred to the level of understanding of the A+ Education Reform Act of 2000, were listed in table 10.

Table 10

| Level of Understanding of A+ Education Reform Act of 2000 as it Pertains to Principalship |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Variable                        | Value  | Frequency | Percentage | M    | SD    | N   |
| Understanding                   |        |           |            | 3.37 | .52   | 188 |
| Strongly Agree                  | 4      | 73        | 38.8       |      |       |     |
| Agree                           | 3      | 112       | 59.6       |      |       |     |
| Disagree                        | 2      | 3         | 1.6        |      |       |     |
| Strongly Disagree               | 1      | 0         | 0          |      |       |     |

Elementary school principals responded from strongly agree to disagree with the level of understanding of the A+ Education Reform Act of 2000 as it pertains to the role of principal with a mean score of 3.37. Elementary school principals overwhelmingly believed (98.4%) that they understood the A+ Education Reform Act of 2000 as it pertained to their role as a building principal. Only a small percentage (1.6%) of those responding did not believe they understood the process.

Question 8 within the second section of the survey asked principals to evaluate their abilities to address conflict resolution within school council
meetings involving different stakeholder groups. Table 11 represents the frequencies and percentages of their responses.

Table 11

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Possess Skills</td>
<td>3.45</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>48.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Elementary school principals solidly believed (95.2%) they possessed the adequate skills to address conflict during school council meetings when having to deal with different stakeholder groups. Only a small percentage (3.7%) believed they did not possess the skills needed to address conflict with different stakeholder groups and no one responded with a "strongly disagree" value.

Elementary school principals responded with a mean score of 3.45.

Question 9 within the second section of the survey researched principals’ beliefs with respect to including teachers in the decision making process to improve student performance. Table 12 represents the frequencies and percentages for this question.
Elementary school principals strongly agreed that having teachers involved in the decision making process would help improve student performance. All respondents answered by either agreeing (25.5%) or strongly agreeing (73.9%) with the involvement with a mean score of 3.74. No principal disagreed with having teachers involved in the decision making process.

Question 10, the last question in the second section of the survey, researched principals’ beliefs on using "High-stakes testing" to improve student performance. Table 13 represents the frequencies and percentages for this question.
Table 13

*High-Stakes Testing will Improve Student Performance*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Testing will improve performance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2.59</td>
<td>.72</td>
<td>187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>47.3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>38.3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The researcher revealed a definite split in responses from elementary school principals concerning using “High-stakes testing” to improve student performance. Close to one half (47.3%) of the respondents agreed with using testing to improve student performance with another small percentage (8.5%) strongly agreeing. Slightly less than one half (43.6%) of the respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with testing positively affecting student performance. Elementary school principals responded with a mean score of 2.59 and a standard deviation statistic (.72) indicated that principals’ responses varied to a larger extent on this item than on any other question analyzed on this section of the survey.

*Principals’ Evaluations of Specific Components*

The third section of the survey addressed research question one: What are the present perceptions of Georgia elementary principals’ since the full implementation of A+ Education Reform Act of 2000? Principals rated their perceptions of specific components of the A+ Education Reform Act of 2000 from
“very valuable”, “valuable”, of “little value”, or of “no value”. Table 14 summarizes these data descriptively. Table 15 represents the percentages for each component and value.

Table 14

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Components</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Perceptions</td>
<td>178</td>
<td>1.82</td>
<td>3.82</td>
<td>2.87</td>
<td>.234</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Councils</td>
<td>188</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.41</td>
<td>.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pupil – Teacher Ratio</td>
<td>187</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.79</td>
<td>.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EIP/REP Models</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.47</td>
<td>.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extra Days Remediation</td>
<td>187</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.38</td>
<td>.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology Proficiency</td>
<td>188</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.99</td>
<td>.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Composite School Ratings</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.26</td>
<td>.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rewards for “A” and “B” Ratings</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.49</td>
<td>.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sanctions for “D” and “F” Ratings</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.19</td>
<td>.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increases in Student Assessment</td>
<td>187</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.65</td>
<td>.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mandatory Local Staff Development</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.21</td>
<td>.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers’ Evaluation of Principals</td>
<td>188</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.79</td>
<td>.77</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 15

*Principal’s Evaluation of Specific Components of the A+Education Reform Act of 2000*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Very Valuable</th>
<th>Valuable</th>
<th>Little Value</th>
<th>No Value</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Councils</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>39.4</td>
<td>46.8</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>2.41</td>
<td>.72</td>
<td>188</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pupil Teacher Ratio</td>
<td>78.7</td>
<td>20.2</td>
<td>.5</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>3.79</td>
<td>.42</td>
<td>187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EIP/REP Model</td>
<td>52.1</td>
<td>42.0</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>3.47</td>
<td>.63</td>
<td>186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extra Days Remediation</td>
<td>49.5</td>
<td>38.3</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>3.38</td>
<td>.69</td>
<td>187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology Proficiency</td>
<td>23.9</td>
<td>54.8</td>
<td>17.6</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>2.99</td>
<td>.75</td>
<td>188</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Composite School Ratings</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>36.7</td>
<td>41.5</td>
<td>17.0</td>
<td>2.26</td>
<td>.78</td>
<td>185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rewards for “A” and “B” Ratings</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td>36.2</td>
<td>38.8</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td>2.49</td>
<td>.85</td>
<td>185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sanctions for “D” and “F” Ratings</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>31.9</td>
<td>43.1</td>
<td>20.2</td>
<td>2.19</td>
<td>.80</td>
<td>186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increases in Student Assessment</td>
<td>14.4</td>
<td>42.6</td>
<td>35.6</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>2.65</td>
<td>.81</td>
<td>187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mandatory Local Staff Development</td>
<td>35.6</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>3.21</td>
<td>.71</td>
<td>186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers’ Evaluation of Principals</td>
<td>17.6</td>
<td>47.3</td>
<td>31.4</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>2.79</td>
<td>.77</td>
<td>188</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Eleven components of the A+ Education Reform Act of 2000 were selected for research that may have influence on elementary principals’ roles as building administrators. Overall perceptions of these specific components disclosed a minimum score of 1.82 and a maximum score of 3.82 with a mean score of 2.87. Of the eleven components studied, three components reported to be “very valuable” with four more components reporting “valuable”. Four components were revealed as of “little value”.

Components that obtained the “very valuable” rating consisted of reduction in pupil/teacher ratio (78.7%), EIP/REP models using additional teachers (52.1%), and extra days of remedial instruction (49.5%). When combining the “valuable” responses with the “very valuable” responses from all three components, principals solidly believed that reduction of pupil/teacher ratio (98.9%), EIP/REP models using additional teachers (94.1%), and extra days of remedial instruction (87.8%) were significant components to the A+ Education Reform Act of 2000.

Components that obtained the “valuable” rating included technology proficiency for certificate renewal for all personnel (54.8%), increases in student assessment (42.6%), mandatory local staff development (50.0%) and inclusion of teachers’ assessment of their principals as a component of principals’ evaluations (47.3%). When combining the “very valuable” and the “valuable” responses, again principals strongly believed that technology proficiency for certificate renewal (78.7%), mandatory local staff development (85.6%), and inclusion of teachers’ assessment of their principals as a component of
principals’ evaluation (64.9%) were valuable to the A+ Education Reform Act of 2000. Although the increasing of student assessment component was regarded as “valuable”, over one third of the respondents identified this component as having “little” or “no value”. The principals’ responses varied with a higher standard deviation than all but one of the components in this section of the survey (.81). One third of those responding also identified teachers’ assessment of their principals as having “little” or “no value”.

Components that obtained a rating of “little value” included school councils (46.8%), composite school rewards (41.5%), rewards of “A” and “B” ratings (38.8%), and sanctions for “D” and “F” ratings (43.1%). When combining the “little value” and “no value” ratings for these components, more than half of the respondents believed these components to be of less value to the A+ Education Reform Act of 2000. Responses did show that even with a higher percentage of responses in the “little” or “no value” ratings for school rewards (50.5%), a comparable percentage of principals believed these components as “valuable” or “very valuable” (47.9%). The principals’ responses varied more in the areas of school ratings and rewards and sanctions according to the standard deviations.

Although composite school ratings, rewards for “A” and “B” ratings, and sanctions for “D” and “F” ratings were deemed as having “little” value, over one third of the respondents saw these as having value to the A+ Education Reform Act of 2000. When combining “very valuable” and “valuable” in these three components responses showed 39.9% seeing value with composite school ratings, 47.9% seeing value in rewards, and 35.6% seeing value in sanctions. A mere 4.8 percentage points separated “valuable” and “little value” for composite
school ratings and 2.6 percentage points separated “valuable” and “little value” for having rewards for “A” and “B” ratings.

Principals’ Open-Ended Responses

Principals were given four open-ended questions to respond to and offer input to the A+ Education Reform Act of 2000 and how it has impacted their role as a building administrator. The researcher studied the responses to each question for theme and patterns of responses. Categories were established according to the themes and patterns within the responses. Frequencies of the patterns were recorded by the researcher to chart the number of responses within each category. A third party expert was engaged to verify the responses for theme and patterns. Many principals did not respond to some and/or all of the open-ended questions. Several principals gave more than one response to a question. The following four tables represent the data, categories and frequencies of responses for each of the open-ended questions.

Survey question 12 responses have been reported in Table 16. In response to question 12, “How will the A+ Education Reform Act of 2000 influence the way you manage your roles and responsibilities as a building administrator?” principals revealed a number of patterns and themes through their responses. More of the principals responding to this question were influenced with increased testing and data analysis. Principals revealed testing emphasis and added focus on accountability for student achievement as a concern. Uneasiness was indicated in remarks such as “Increase awareness of accountability has influenced and increased use of data to make instructional and
### Table 16

**Open-ended Question 1 (Survey question 12)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category of Responses</th>
<th>Frequencies of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No response</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More emphasis on testing/accountability/data analysis</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little or no change</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More professional development</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus on instruction</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Added pressure and stress</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared decision making</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A+ adds responsibilities/duties</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus on managing</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus on time management skills</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intensification of leadership</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Just following the mandates</td>
<td>5 or &lt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More documentation and paperwork</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus on importance of student improvement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCLB supersedes A+</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A+ is motivating</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School council is time consuming</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

assessment decisions” (101), “high-stakes testing makes parents, students and teachers on edge” (60), and “dealing with teachers who are stressed out about ‘high-stakes’ testing is sometimes difficult and stressful in itself” (122).
One principal alluded,

I feel that most everything I do revolves around testing. When I am disciplining students, I remind them they have a test to take. At teacher meetings, our focus is how can we effectively teach CRCT skills. Our focus with parents has been information about the test (12).

Even though a large number of principals voiced opinions of how the A+ Education Reform Act of 2000 would influence their roles, many principals responded that the A+ Education Reform Act of 2000 had little or no influence on their roles and responsibilities as a building principal. Several principals responded, “A good principal uses the components of the A+ Education Reform Act of 2000 by nature” (134), “actually I have not significantly changed the way I manage my roles” (42), and “it won’t much – I believe in quality education regardless of the A+ act” (187), “it will not change the way we do business here” (6), and “not much, I have always had high expectations for students/staff” (43).

One principal answered, “The way I manage my roles and responsibilities has nothing to do with the A+ Reform Act of 2000. I try to do my job in a professional manner and I take pride in running a good school” (58).

An increase in professional development was a response given by some of the principals responding as something required by the A+ Education Reform Act of 2000 that would influence their role as a building administrator.

Respondent 52 concluded, “I spend more time on staff development and training for teachers in an attempt to provide them with the skills needed to meet the needs of the diverse student body.” Other principals commented, “I have to participate in ongoing staff development for myself as well as my staff. I learn
and teach others” (172), “it forces principals to ‘stay on their toes’ about planning quality staff development” (91), and “it will influence my role as a leader by making sure I provide my staff with the resources that they need to better help our children to be successful” (131).

Although a number of principals revealed more of a focus on instruction and becoming more of an instructional leader. Comments such as “I find I spend more time as an instructional leader involved in the curriculum aspect rather than a building manager” (177), “it has changed my style to try to focus on instruction and away from day-to-day building/staff management” (83), and “it forces principals to ‘stay on our toes’ about instruction” (91). Respondent 128 revealed, “The principal must be the instructional leader.”

A number of respondents alluded to the added pressures and stress from carrying out the mandates of the A+ Education Reform Act of 2000. Respondent 115 answered, “It adds stress to an already stressful job!” Other principals revealed, “Increases responsibility and stress” (37), and “it will add more pressure to perform” (162). As well as added pressures and stress, several principals reported opinions on documentation and paperwork when carrying out mandates. Respondent 79 revealed, “It has increased paperwork and stress on everyone. No time to TEACH!” Other respondents concluded, “I must spend more time on paperwork relating to accountability issues” (133), and “it requires more time to do paperwork and attend all the meetings of the various groups” (167).

The researcher further studied role perceptions of Georgia elementary principal by giving principals an opportunity to respond to survey question 13 that
asked, “How do you feel about involving different stakeholder groups in decision making as it relates to student performance?” Table 17 reveals frequencies of responses and thematic patterns from those principals responding.

Table 17

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category of Responses</th>
<th>Frequencies of Respondents</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Necessity with involving stakeholders in decision making</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>188</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No response</td>
<td>45</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hard due to stakeholders not understanding the process</td>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers are the most important part</td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative comment about council (time consuming, length of time making decisions, impractical)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gives “buy-in” or ownership</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Important and must include training for stakeholders concerning process</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use only as advisory council or for feedback</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Councils have own agendas</td>
<td>4 or &lt;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hard time finding willing members</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School personnel have ultimate authority</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal has ultimate authority</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overwhelmingly, principals were approving in regards to involving different stakeholder groups in decision making as it relates to student performance. In fact, several principals reported having advisory or school councils within their schools prior to having it mandated. Respondent 128 revealed, “I welcome input
from different stakeholder groups. After all, it is going to take everyone to education our students.” Others reported, “I value their input and have always sought it” (91), “stakeholders are very valuable resources and are the key to closing the gap” (9), “valuable to student performance” (38), and “It is strongly advised and necessary for true student academic gains, performance and measures” (46).

Many of the principals responding did voice concerns with involving stakeholders in decision making in that the stakeholders are uniformed or do not understand the process. Respondent 37 reported, “Most stakeholders don’t understand the ‘big picture’ and only see problems from their own point of view.” Respondent 58 reported, “All stakeholders do not possess the same educational level or degree of knowledge that professional educators do. It is difficult for some stakeholders to make educationally sound decisions based upon their personal level of proficiency.” Respondent 156 reported, “I have some reservations in including others who lack an understanding of the educational process.”

Several principals were supportive of involving stakeholders when stakeholders were trained in the process. Responses included, “Parents, teachers, community members should only be allowed to voice opinions after receiving extensive training on what to look for in a school setting” (28), “stakeholders can provide support after they fully understand the learning process” (30), and “I like the opinions of our stakeholders when they understand what we are up against and understand all the testing and report cards for schools” (181).
Many principals revealed that having stakeholders involved was important in decision making but that educators were the most important participant. Several responses included, “I feel that we are the experts in our field” (186), “…the final decision should rest with the administration and teachers as they are in the classrooms and really know the big picture” (163), and “I think teachers know best and should have the biggest say” (122).

Several of the principals responding reported that involving different stakeholder groups strengthens ownership with decisions that are made. Respondent 12 reported, “This gives the teachers buy-in and they are more apt to implement the strategies if they are part of the decision making.” Other principals reported, “Has to be done in order to have enough ‘buy-in’ so anything can be accomplished” (116), “Highly important to the ‘buy-in’ process” (179), and “By giving stakeholders the opportunity to share increases their feeling of ownership within the local school” (66).

Question 14 on the survey asked, “How has the new administration for Georgia changed or affected your role as principal as you continue to carry out A+ components?” and offered principals an opportunity for response. Table 18 represents the patterns and theme within the responses as well as frequencies of responses.
Table 18

*Open-ended Question 3 (Survey question 14)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category of Responses</th>
<th>Frequencies of Respondents</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No response</td>
<td>51</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little or no impact or change of role</td>
<td>38</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frustration/more pressure</td>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More support is being offered</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Budget/funding cuts have hurt</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continue just to do my best</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More emphasis on testing/data</td>
<td>5 or &lt;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having to be more of a leader of leaders</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More of a clear focus</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changed some components to be more fair/manageable</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not enough support</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GPS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCLB</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Just concerned with components</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased accountability</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More of an instructional leader</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better communication</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A large number of the principals responding revealed that the new administration had little or no impact on their role as principal. Several of the principals reported, “Very little. I work in a system with high expectations and believe we should always work to improve our schools” (25), “I don’t think the new administration has affected how I carry out the components” (134), and “I have noticed no change due to the new administration” (52).
Several principals revealed frustration and added pressure had affected their role as principal in carrying out the A+ Education Reform Act of 2000 under a new administration. Some of the principals reported, “My responsibilities have increased tremendously…I do not believe the changes or demands have increased learning” (30), “Who knows! Week to week they change!” (79), and “It has spread me too thin to do a really good job!” (176).

A number of the principals that responded reported more support from the new administration. Several principals reported, “New administration has been very supportive and active in ensuring that we are well aware of the new Georgia Performance Standards” (9), and “Kathy Cox is very knowledgeable of what goes on in a classroom so her work with the state legislature will continue to be helpful” (62). Respondent 128 revealed,

> It has had a positive affect as I believe the administration has a vision for the children in Georgia schools. It makes me want to do more knowing that the higher ups really seem to care and want to make and are making some needed changes.

The final survey question asked principals, “If you could amend the A+ legislative components, what suggestions would you offer?” and was designed to offer principals an opportunity to offer any input for changes in the current mandates. Table 19 represents the patterns and themes within the responses as well as frequencies of responses.
A number of principals responding to question 15 made suggestions dealing with budgeting and funding of the mandates. Some of the principals revealed, “Totally fund what is required – if it is required it should be funded completely” (15), “additional funding for reducing pupil/teacher ratio” (152), “More funding for technology, more funding and implementation options for ESOL and special education students” (172), and “Fund the mandates fully” (58).
Respondent 66 reported, “Only put in changes that can be fully funded. Don’t just say things about improving the quality of education in order to win votes and get re-elected.”

Many principals revealed suggestions in reference to offering more support for at-risk students including special education and ESOL students. Principals made suggestions including, “Get the special education student scores out of the regular education reporting. Yes, have the same expectations but test at their grade level” (74), “Do not include special education students in scores to determine AYP” (145), and “eliminate the use of special education students’ scores on CRCT as a basis for making AYP even if a school has a subgroup of special education students” (149). Respondent 107 concluded,

I know it is important to close the achievement gaps between groups. I do think we should hold all students accountable. However, it is ridiculous to think that children coming into a school as a non-English speaker will make the same progress in a year as an English speaking student.

A number of principals reported suggestions with the components concerning rating/grading schools. Principals supporting changes with these components commented, “Do away with the grading of schools” (123), “Eliminate grades” (92), “I do not like the idea of ‘grading schools’. Can you imagine how you would feel if your school got a D or F?” (42), and “Before ‘grading’ a school, all factors are considered (demographics, geographics, etc)” (46).
A number of principals responded with suggestions concerning school councils. “Do away with school councils” (127), “School councils should be optional” (149), “Drop school councils” (33), and “I would suggest that school councils are not necessary in all districts. My district had advisory councils in place in all schools. There is no need for such formality and rigid procedures for school councils” (52) were several responses from this group of principals.

Another group of responses included suggestions concerning the deemphasis on high stakes testing. Respondents alluded to the negativity of this mandate. Several principals reported, “it would be beneficial to everyone if standardized testing was only one component of how a school performance was measured” (96), “Use more data for promotion instead of one high stakes test: compare data on one group of students or grade annually rather than compare students in same grade annually” (64), and “One test (CRCT) is not the only assessment that should be used to determine the achievement of a student – this should not determine promotion/retention. A variety of assessments are needed to determine the achievement of a student” (63).

Comparison of Role Perceptions to Previous A+ Study

A previous study on the A+ Education Reform Act of 2000 established baseline data on elementary principals role perceptions in the initial phase of implementation (Wright, 2001). Comparison of data gathered in the previous study to the data recently gathered from the new study helped to answer research question 2: Have Georgia elementary principals’ changed their roles based on their perceptions of A+ Education Reform Act of 2000?
Table 20 represents descriptive statistics gathered from both Wright and Newton in their respective studies on responses concerning principals’ general perceptions of the A+ Education Reform Act of 2000. Statistics from the Wright study were converted from a five point Likert scale to a four-point scale by the researcher to match the statistics from the Newton study.

Table 20

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Components</th>
<th>Wright’s Study 2001</th>
<th>Newton’s Study 2005</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Perceptions</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of understanding of A+ Education Reform Act of 2000</td>
<td>3.26</td>
<td>.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skills for Conflict with School Council</td>
<td>3.12</td>
<td>.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Decision-Making/Improving Student Performance</td>
<td>3.58</td>
<td>.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High-Stakes Testing</td>
<td>2.03</td>
<td>.80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Principals revealed they have a better understanding of the A+ Education Reform Act of 2000 as it pertains to their role as principal with a mean score increase from 3.26 to 3.37 with 2.5 being the mean response. The principals also showed they more adequately possessed skills to address conflict involving different stakeholder groups with an increase from 3.12 to 3.45 with 2.5 being the mean. The respondents also believed strongly with involving teachers in the decision-making process to improve student performance with an increase of
3.58 to 3.74. The most significant increase was the responses concerning the use of "high-stakes testing" to improve student performance which moved from the disagree rating of 2.03 to a slightly higher than average rating of 2.59. The standard deviation was high in both studies (.80 and .72) showing that principals varied more on this question for general perceptions than any other question in this section.

The researcher used an independent t-test to compare data from both studies for levels of significance. Table 21 represents compared statistics from each study after completing the independent t-test on the data from the section on general role perceptions. In making the independent t-test, the researcher found that all comparisons were found to be very significant (.000).

Table 21

Comparison for Significance of Wright’s Data to Newton’s Data – General Role Perceptions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Components</th>
<th>T</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>Mean Diff.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Perceptions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal variances Assumed</td>
<td>-12.321</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>-.6327</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal variances Not assumed</td>
<td>-14.225</td>
<td>498.998</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>-.6327</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of Understanding of A+ Education Reform Act of 2000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal variances Assumed</td>
<td>-5.369</td>
<td>506</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>-.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal variances Not assumed</td>
<td>-6.137</td>
<td>505.568</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>-.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skills for Conflict with School Council</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal variances Assumed</td>
<td>-7.858</td>
<td>503</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>-.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal variances Not assumed</td>
<td>-9.438</td>
<td>470.628</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>-.80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 21 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Components</th>
<th>T</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>Mean Diff.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Decision-Making/Improving Student Performance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal variances Assumed</td>
<td>-4.726</td>
<td>505</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>-.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal variances Not assumed</td>
<td>-5.610</td>
<td>484.449</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>-.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High-Stakes Testing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal variances Assumed</td>
<td>-10.880</td>
<td>504</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>-1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal variances Not assumed</td>
<td>-12.135</td>
<td>499.884</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>-1.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 22 represents compared descriptive statistics from each study on responses concerning perceptions of value of specific components that are part of the A+ Education Reform Act of 2000. Statistics from the Wright study were converted from a three-point rating scale to a four-point scale by the researcher to match the statistics from the Newton study. Specific components that are no longer part of the A+ Education Reform Act of 2000 due to being amended by legislators were removed from the survey and not part of the Newton study.

After full implementation of the A+ Education Reform Act of 2000, principals revealed a strong belief of value with several specific components. Ten of the eleven components had a decrease of value through the mean scores. Only one component (increases in student assessment) had an increase in the mean score.

Responses concerning reduction in pupil/teacher ratio revealed mean scores of 3.95 and 3.79 which is a difference of .16 and is close to a score of
4.00 (very valuable). Another slight decrease was revealed in the ratings of EIP/REP models and the use of additional teachers moving from 3.73 to 3.47.

Table 22

Comparison of Specific Components of A+ Education Reform Act of 2000 to Previous A+ Study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Components</th>
<th>Wright’s Study 2001</th>
<th>Newton’s Study 2005</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Totals of Specific Components</td>
<td>M 3.12</td>
<td>M 2.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SD .75</td>
<td>SD .38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Councils</td>
<td>2.96.84</td>
<td>2.41 .72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pupil – Teacher Ratio</td>
<td>3.95 .29</td>
<td>3.79 .42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EIP/REP models</td>
<td>3.73 .60</td>
<td>3.47 .63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extra Days Remediation</td>
<td>3.56 .71</td>
<td>3.38 .69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology Proficiency</td>
<td>3.49 .76</td>
<td>2.99 .75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Composite School Ratings</td>
<td>2.37 .84</td>
<td>2.26 .78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rewards for “A” and “B” Ratings</td>
<td>2.48 .89</td>
<td>2.46 .85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sanctions for “D” and “F” Ratings</td>
<td>2.29 .84</td>
<td>2.19 .80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increases in Student Assessment</td>
<td>2.53 .92</td>
<td>2.65 .81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mandatory Local Staff Development</td>
<td>3.72 .68</td>
<td>3.21 .71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers’ Evaluation of Principals</td>
<td>3.08 .87</td>
<td>2.79 .77</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Principals’ beliefs of value in school councils decreased from a mean score of 2.96 to 2.41 after having worked with this component from 2000 to the present. Another similar decrease was seen when comparing the mean scores
concerning technology proficiency for certificate renewal. The mean score
decreased by .50 moving from 3.49 to 2.99.

The components relating to school ratings and rewards and sanctions
decreased in value. The mean score for composite school ratings decreased by
.11 from 2.37 to 2.26. The mean scores for rewards for “A” and “B” ratings
revealed a negligible decrease from 2.48 to 2.46. The mean scores for sanctions
were lower in value and also decreased from 2.29 to 2.19. Standard deviations
for all of these components were higher than most showing a high variety in
responses from both sets of principals.

Mandatory local staff development had a decrease in value according to
the new respondents, as did the component of teachers’ evaluations of
principals. Mean scores for mandatory staff development decreased from 3.72 to
3.21 still showing a strong belief in the component but not as significant.
Principals’ belief in inclusion of teachers’ assessment of their principals as part of
evaluation showed a decrease of .29 from 3.08 to 2.79.

The only component with an increase in the mean score dealt with the
increase in student assessment. The mean score increased slightly from 2.53 to
2.65. Both standard deviations were high showing a variety of scores from the
respondents. This increase shows principals hold a stronger belief of value for
this component than from the previous study.

Comparison of the totals of all the specific components showed a
decrease in the value of the specific components of the A+ Education Reform Act
of 2000. According to the respondents, principals total value of specific
components of the A+ Education Reform Act of 2000 decreased from a 3.12 to a 2.87. The variance of ratings was not as wide from the latest group of principals showing their responses were fairly close with a standard deviation of .38. A t-test for significance was not used on specific components due to the changes to the survey for the current study.

*Principals’ Demographics*

The researcher used data from section 1 of the survey to gather demographic and personal information from the respondents. Six questions were given for principals to respond to in order to help answer research question 3: Do Georgia elementary principals’ perceptions of the A+ Education Reform Act 2000 vary by age, gender, level of education, length of service, or geographical location of school?

The researcher intended to ascertain whether the information gathered on elementary principals from Georgia would vary according to the variables listed in the third research question. The one-way analysis of variance statistical procedure was applied to examine differences in general perceptions of the A+ Education Reform Act of 2000. There was no significant difference of variance with responses for general perceptions when compared with the gender, level of education, length of service and geographical location of school. The researcher did reveal a level of significance when studying the years of experience of the principal responding to skills for conflict with school councils and the increase of high stakes testing to improve student performance. Table 23 represents the results of the comparison of the years of experience of principals regarding the
two general perceptions of the A+ Education Reform Act of 2000 showing significance.

Table 23

Analysis of Variance of Principals’ Demographics to General Role Perceptions – Years of Experience

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>MS</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level as it Pertains To Job</td>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.605</td>
<td>2.314</td>
<td>.077</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Within Groups</td>
<td>184</td>
<td>.282</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>187</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skills for Conflict with School Council</td>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.544</td>
<td>5.068</td>
<td>.002*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Within Groups</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>.305</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>185</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher/Decision Making</td>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.245</td>
<td>1.282</td>
<td>.282</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Within Groups</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>.191</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>185</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High-Stakes Testing</td>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.495</td>
<td>2.953</td>
<td>.034*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Within Groups</td>
<td>183</td>
<td>.506</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>186</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Perceptions</td>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.322</td>
<td>2.641</td>
<td>.051</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Within Groups</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>.122</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>183</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

p = < .05

To further investigate the relationship of years experience to general perceptions of the principals, the researcher used a post-hoc test (Tukey’s HSD model). When comparing skills for conflict between the .5 years –3 years and 4 - 6 years experience, the researcher revealed a mean difference of .37 at the significance level of .003. When comparing the general perception of increasing high-stakes testing among the years experience of the principals responding, the researcher revealed the significant differences between the principals with .5 –3
years and more than 10 years experience with a mean difference of .35 at the significance level of .05.

The researcher used a one-way analysis of variance statistical procedure to examine differences in the specific components of the A+ Education Reform Act of 2000 among the subgroups of the variables listed in research question three. When comparing among the years of experience in each of the specific components using ANOVA, the researcher found a significant difference in school councils, “D” and “F” ratings, increase of student assessment, mandatory local staff development, teachers assessing principals as part of their evaluations and total specific components. Table 24 represents the results of the one-way statistical analysis.

Table 24

*Analysis of Variance of Principals’ Demographics to Specific Components of the A+ Education Reform Act of 2000—Years Experience*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>MS</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School Councils</td>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.744</td>
<td>3.463</td>
<td>.017*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Within Groups</td>
<td>184</td>
<td>.502</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>187</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pupil–teacher Ratio</td>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.104</td>
<td>.573</td>
<td>.633</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Within Groups</td>
<td>183</td>
<td>.181</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>186</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EIP/REP Models</td>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.033</td>
<td>.083</td>
<td>.969</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Within Groups</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>.397</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>185</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extra Days Remedations</td>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.452</td>
<td>.954</td>
<td>.416</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Within Groups</td>
<td>183</td>
<td>.474</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>186</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
To further investigate the relationships of specific components to the years experience of principals, the researcher conducted a post-hoc test (Turkey’s HSD model). When comparing school councils between the .5 – 3 years and 7-10 years of experience, the researcher revealed a mean difference of .28 at the significance level of .023. When comparing sanctions/"D" and "F" ratings between 4 – 6 years and more than 10 years experience, the researcher
revealed a mean difference of .50 at the significance level of .020. When comparing increases in student assessment between .5 – 3 years experience and more than 10 years experience, the researcher revealed a mean difference of .46 at the significance level of .022. When comparing mandatory staff development between .5 – 3 years and more than 10 years experience, the researcher revealed a mean difference of .48 at the significance level of .003. When comparing the total of specific components between .5 – 3 years and more than 10 years experience, the researcher revealed a mean difference of .23 at the significance level of .005.

When studying specific components and the age of the respondents, significance of variance was reported with increases in student assessments and teachers assessing principals as part of evaluation. Table 25 represents the results of the one-way statistical analysis.

Table 25

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>MS</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School Councils</td>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>.793</td>
<td>1.535</td>
<td>.194</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Within Groups</td>
<td>183</td>
<td>.513</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>187</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pupil – teacher Ratio</td>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>.263</td>
<td>1.475</td>
<td>.211</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Within Groups</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>.178</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>186</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EIP/REP Models</td>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>.144</td>
<td>.363</td>
<td>.835</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Within Groups</td>
<td>181</td>
<td>.396</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>185</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
To further investigate the relationship of specific components to the age of principals, the researcher conducted a post-hoc test (Turkey's HSD model).

When comparing increases in student assessment between 46-55 age group and
up to 35 age group, the researcher revealed a mean difference of .61 at the significance level of .05. When comparing teachers assessing principals between up to 35 age group and 36-45 age group, the researcher revealed a mean difference of .68 at the significance level of .025. When comparing teachers assessing principals between up to 35 age group and 46-55 age group, the researcher revealed a mean difference .61 at the significance level of .034.

When studying specific components and the gender of the respondents, significance of variance was reported with school councils, technology proficiency, rewards/“A” and “B” ratings, and mandatory local staff development.

Table 26 represents the results of the one-way statistical analysis.

Table 26

Analysis of Variance of Principals’ Demographics to Specific Components of the A+ Education Reform Act of 2000—Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>MS</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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* p = < .05

When studying specific components and the level of education of the respondents, significance of variance was reported with mandatory staff development. When studying specific components and the school community served, significance of variance was reported with teachers assessing principals.
as a part of evaluation. Table 27 and Table 28 represent the results of the one-way statistical analysis for both variables.

Table 27

**Analysis of Variances of Principals’ Demographics to Specific Components of the A+ Education Reform Act of 2000—Level of Education**

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* p = < .05

Table 28

Analysis of Variances of Principals’ Demographics to Specific Components of the A+ Education Reform Act of 2000—Community Served

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* p = < .05

Post hoc tests were not performed for either component because at least one group had fewer than two cases. This prevented the researcher from determining where the sample differences varied.

Summary

The researcher investigated the perceptions of Georgia elementary principals regarding general role perceptions of the A+ Education Reform Act of
A random sample of Georgia elementary principals responded to a survey with a return rate of 47%. Of those responding, over half were female between 46 and 55 years of age and possessed the Education Specialist Degree.

The principals responded strongly that they understood the A+ Education Reform Act of 2000 as it pertained to their role as principal. They also believed they possessed the adequate skills to address conflict during school council meetings when dealing with different stakeholder groups. No principal disagreed with having teachers involved in the decision-making process to improve student performance with almost three-fourths of the respondents strongly agreeing. More than half of those responding agreed to strongly agreed with high-stakes testing improving student performance but the response level for those disagreeing was slightly less than one-half of those responding.

Of the 11 items selected for study within the A+ Education Reform Act of 2000 relating to roles and responsibilities, three components reported to be “very valuable” with four more components reported as “valuable”. Four components were reported as of “little value”. Reduction in pupil/teacher ratio, EIP/REP models using additional teachers, and extra days of remedial instruction were all reported as “very valuable” by principals. Technology proficiency for certificate renewal, increases in student assessments, mandatory staff development and inclusion of teachers’ assessment of principals for evaluations were reported as “valuable”. School councils, composite school rewards, rewards for “A” and “B”
ratings, and sanctions for “D” and “F” ratings were reported as having “little value”.

When comparing baseline data gathered by Wright on elementary principals’ role perceptions in the initial phase of implementation of the A+ Education Reform Act of 2000 to the data gathered from the current study, principals revealed they have a better understanding of the A+ Education Reform Act of 2000 as it pertains to their role as principal. They also showed they have more adequately possessed skills to address conflict involving different stakeholder groups. The respondents agree more strongly with involving teachers in the decision-making process to improve student performance.

When comparing baseline data gathered by Wright on elementary principals’ perceptions of specific components of the A+ Education Reform Act of 2000 to the data gathered from the current study, ten of the eleven components researched had a decrease in value. Only one component had an increase in value. School councils, pupil/teacher ratio, EIP/REP models, extra days remediation, technology proficiency, composite school ratings, rewards for “A” and “B” ratings, sanctions for “D” and “F” ratings, mandatory local staff development, and teachers’ evaluations of principals had a decrease in value through the mean scores. The component concerning increases in student assessment did have a slight increase in the mean score.

The researcher applied a one-way analysis of variance statistical procedure to examine for variances in perceptions according to demographic information given by the respondents. There was no significant difference in
responses for general role perceptions when compared with gender, level of education, length of service and geographical location of school. When comparing years of experience with two of the general perceptions, skills for conflict with school councils and increases in high stakes testing to improve student performance, the researcher reported these comparisons to vary.

When comparing demographics with the 11 specific components of the A+ Education Reform Act of 2000, five components were found to vary when comparing with years of experience of the principals. School councils, sanctions for “D” and “F” ratings, increases in school assessments, mandatory staff development and teachers assessing principals for evaluation all reported variances. The components relating to increases in student assessment and teachers assessing principals for evaluation reported to vary when comparing the age of the principals responding. Components relevant to school councils, technology proficiency, rewards for “A” and “B” ratings, and mandatory staff development reported to vary when comparing with the gender of the principal responding. The mandatory staff development component was also reported to vary when compared with the level of education of the principals. The component of teachers assessing principals for evaluation was reported to vary when compared with the school community of the principal.

The researcher included four open-ended questions in the survey as an opportunity for principals to deepen the data gathered from the survey items. After analyzing the responses for patterns and themes, the researcher reported a portion of principals responded that the A+ Education Reform Act of 2000
influenced the way they managed their roles and responsibilities as a building administrator with a greater emphasis on testing and data analysis. A slightly smaller group responded little or no change had taken place with their role as a building administrator. Principals strongly supported the involvement of different stakeholder groups in decision making. Several groups responded to the importance to include training for the stakeholders to understand the process.

A variety of suggestions were given by the respondents as to suggestions for amending the A+ Education Reform Act of 2000. A large group of principals commented on increasing funding and fully funding mandates. More support was suggested for at-risk students including ESOL and special education students. A number of principals reported amending grading schools and eliminating school councils.
CHAPTER 5
SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

School reform is evident within school systems today and research shows the role of principal is one of the most important to carry out reform effectively. The principal has to be an instructional leader, use data for decision-making, and lead the staff with a vision for academic achievement. School reform will not take place if the principal is not a driving force in the reform system. Principals have the first hand knowledge with implementing school reform and have a wealth of information to ensure that the reform is effective for success with student achievement.

Principals are held accountable for achievements from students oftentimes with their jobs pending the outcome of certain data. Clearly lacking from the reform is the leadership role of the building administrator. Policy makers may mandate educational policies, but the policies are pointless without strong leadership to implement them in schools. The importance of principals to school achievement makes it vital to research the principal’s role during mandated school reform carefully.

To date, only one study has been done specifically on the A+ Education Reform Act of 2000 and role perceptions of elementary school principals. More research was needed on A+ Education Reform Act of 2000 and principals’ perceptions on mandated education reform to strengthen and extend the existing data. More research may also strengthen understanding towards the effects that mandated reform has on principals. Principals, as
building administrators, need to have the opportunity to express this information
in the midst of comprehensive education reform.

Summary

The researcher’s purpose was to study the role perceptions of
Georgia elementary school principals after implementation of the A+
Education Reform Act of 2000. A descriptive research design was used by the
researcher to address the following research questions:

1. What are the present perceptions of Georgia elementary principals since
   the full implementation of A+ Education Reform Act of 2000?
2. Have Georgia elementary principals changed their roles based on their
   perceptions of A+ Education Reform Act of 2000?
3. Do Georgia elementary principals perception changes of
   A+ Education Reform Act of 2000 vary by age, gender, level of
   education, length of service, or geographical location of the school?

The researcher used population from the current 180 school districts in the
state of Georgia as found in the Georgia Public Education Directory for this
study. Using random sampling techniques, the researcher selected
approximately 400 principals within the current school districts of Georgia to
participate in the study, including principals from various geographic and
economic locations. A survey was sent to each of the principals selected.

The survey was accompanied by a cover letter explaining the study as
well as a self-addressed stamped envelope for easy return. The researcher sent
a follow-up postcard to all participates several weeks after the initial mailing. A
second and third mailing was necessary to ensure a higher return rate and that a sufficient number of principals participated in the study. The researcher received 188 surveys, which gave a return rate of 47% of the total mailing. The researcher collected both quantitative and qualitative data in order to explore principals’ perceptions objectively and thematically.

Discussion of Research Findings

Policy makers are demanding more positive results from schools due to mandating education reform throughout many states. Principals are greatly impacted by this reform. The researcher gathered data from principals to broaden the understanding of the effects of mandated reform on principals and their jobs. The researcher’s findings strengthened data previously gathered in a recent study to impact policy makers and educators for planning, implementing and changing present and future educational reform.

The following discussion of research findings was presented in response to the three research questions stated in Chapter I. The discussion included the research findings stated in Chapter IV and major themes stated in the literature review from Chapter II.

Research studies previously have shown that strong leadership effects school improvement. The effectiveness of the execution of school reform as well as the outcomes has been connected with the strength of the leader promoting the reform (Fullan, 1997; Kelley, 1998; Tirozzi, 2000). Principals must understand the reform components and “insist on the implementation of policy and practice” (Lambert, 2003, p.43). Overwhelmingly, Georgia principals
believed (98.4%) that they understood the mandated reform as it pertained to their roles as building administrators. Principals from this study also showed a stronger understanding of the **A+ Education Reform Act of 2000** as it pertains to their role as principal with a mean score increase from the 3.26 in Wright’s study to 3.37 in the present study.

Principals also believed (95.2%) they possessed the skills to work with various stakeholder groups involved in school councils which supported Ferrandino’s study (2002) as to the skills principals need for effective school reform. Ferrandino stated principals need skills concerned with knowing how to work with various stakeholder groups.

But principals did report “little value” to the school council component when evaluating specific components of the **A+ Education Reform Act of 2000**. Of those responding to the open-ended questions, 14 principals specifically stated school councils should be eliminated and others questioned the effectiveness of the council members due to a lack of understanding of the process and supported Krishnamoorthi’s (2002) study of Chicago’s Local School Councils (LSCs). Krishnamoorthi stated that educators did not challenge the idea that school councils could assist with improving student achievement but questioned the implementation process and if members had adequate training for the job.

Principals firmly agreed (99.4%) with involving teachers in the decision-making process as it relates to the improvement in student performance, which supported Parker’s & Leithwood’s (2000) studies on shared decision making.
Parker & Leithwood indicated that improvement in schools would take place when those closest to the students were given authority to make important decisions. Principals also overwhelmingly agreed with the necessity of involving stakeholders with decision-making as 92 of those responding qualitatively stated positively to having stakeholders involved.

Review of the literature revealed that policy makers mandated the use of testing for accountability purposes. The use of high stakes testing for accountability has become a consistent priority in the A+ Education Reform Act of 2000 supporting Hamilton & Koretz’s findings that large-scale testing is common in most state and national reform movements. Georgia principals revealed a definite split in responses concerning the use of high-stakes testing for improvement in student achievement. Nearly one half of the principals responding (47.3%) were in agreement that the use of testing will improve student achievement with slightly less than one half (43.6%) indicating disagreement towards the use of testing to improve student achievement. When responding specifically to the increases in student assessment, 57% of the principals responding reported this as a “valuable to very valuable” component of the A+ Education Reform Act of 2000.

The states that were discussed in Chapter II all included the use of testing as a mandate piece of reform. Georgia’s principals also reported testing as a component that has influenced their role as building administrator with 38 of the respondents stating more emphasis on testing and data analysis have influenced their role in some way.
When comparing data from this study to the baseline data from Wright’s study, principals did report positively that testing would increase student performance. The mean score reported by Georgia elementary principals increased from 2.03 to 2.59. Even though a split in responses was reported, principals have begun to see how testing impacts student performance. Principals responded with support for testing as a means for reporting improvement. The data supported Williams (2001) in that even though there are pros and cons concerning testing, educators and the public still both supported testing.

Principals supported Rotbert’s findings (2001) on high-stakes testing when they reported in the open-ended responses that emphasis should be on more than one assessment. Rotbert stated that tests alone do not tell the quality of the education of a school program. This also supported Horn (2003) when he reported that test scores alone do not give all the information needed to make the critical decisions about a school. Horn reported that although the use of standardized tests was intended to help with the improvement of education, it is unadvisable to use a single measure for high-stakes purposes.

Even though more Georgia elementary principals responded negatively towards sanctions and rewards, there was a definite split in the responses given by the respondents towards the use of rewards. Of those responding, 50.5% felt rewards were of “little or no value” with 47.9% agreeing with rewards having value; 63.2% felt sanctions were of “little or no value” with 35.6% agreeing with sanctions having value. Research by Kelley & Protsik (1997) provided
information on both rewards and sanctions and supported that when examining the use of rewards and sanctions it is hard to determine their effect on student performance. It is hard to determine the reason for the student improvement - the monetary reward, or the fear of public embarrassment. The negative responses towards the use of sanctions within the open-ended responses also supported Elmore & Furhman (2001) findings that with sanctions comes increased pressures and stress to improve results as 18 of the respondents reported wanting to amend the grading or rating of schools.

Principals reported “value” to having local staff development as part of the A+ Education Reform Act of 2000 which is supportive of what the National Association of Elementary School Principals (2001) have identified as what principals should know and do. NAESP reported that principals should create a culture that involves continuous learning for adults tied to student learning and school goals. This also supported Lashway (2001) when he concluded that principals must funnel time, staff, materials and resources to greatly impact improving student achievement.

Conclusions

The researcher has concluded from the study that:

1. Georgia elementary principals responding to the survey can be characterized as primarily females, between the ages of 46 – 55 who held an Educational Specialist degree.
2. Georgia elementary principals had a strong understanding of the A+ Education Reform Act as it pertained to their roles as building administrators. Based on survey results, she also concluded that principals must possess skills needed to deal with conflict with different stakeholder groups as well as agree with involving teachers in decision-making to improve student achievement.

3. Georgia elementary principals responded positively on the use of testing to improve student performance.

4. Georgia principals reported that the reduction in pupil/teacher ratio, additional teachers for EIP/REP models, extra days of remedial instruction, mandatory local staff development, and teachers’ evaluations of principals were meaningful components of the A+ Education Reform Act of 2000.

5. Georgia principals reported that composite school ratings, rewards for “A” and “B” ratings, sanctions for “D” and “F” ratings and school councils were of little or no value to the A+ Education Reform Act of 2000.

6. More emphasis on testing and data analysis has influenced the way Georgia elementary school principals have managed the roles and responsibilities as building principals.

7. Amendments to the existing law included fully funding or increasing funding to mandated components, more support for at-risk students including ESOL and special education students, changing grading or
rating schools, eliminating school councils, continuing to reduce class size, amending testing and types of assessments.

Implications

The purpose of the study was to inform Georgia policy makers of the importance of embracing the first-hand knowledge of educators that have been impacted by comprehensive education reform. Those administrators that have been involved day after day can offer information regarding the framework by which they function, and all of the demands and responsibilities they carry out in attempt at school improvement. Principals are a key component in the success or failure of any mandated reform. Policy-makers should involve educators more in the process of education reform for a successful implementation to be at hand.

Policy makers need to assess what is successful at the present time before adopting or revising new strategies for school improvement. Time is a precious commodity. Educators do not want the time they have wasted on mandates that could possibly waste important time and energy.

Many principals are feeling frustrated with the emphasis on accountability. Georgia elementary principals commented that the A+ Education Reform Act of 2000 has added more duties and responsibilities with the same amount of time to carry out these duties. The added mandates continue to place pressure and stress on principals and their day to day job as building administrators. Policy makers need to heed to the effects this has on principals in their attempt to pass policies that will lead the way for improvements in student performance.
Sufficient funding for the mandates should be an imperative to requiring implementation. A number of principals responded in frustration to the carrying out of mandates without funding to assist with the implementation. Reduction of class-size was a positive response but with funding to assist districts to continue the process. Resource inequities among districts across the state should be addressed by policy makers for implementation of reform to be successful.

Policy makers should become more aware of the perceptions regarding composite school ratings, rewards for “A” and “B” schools, and sanctions for “D” and “F” schools. Policy makers need to consider many factors before grading schools. Schools across the state do not have the same demographics or economic funding. A “one size fits all” rating system does not take all these differences into consideration. Principals feel pressure to “make the grade” while carrying out the components of the reform to keep their school off the state’s failing list.

Principals see themselves as more of instructional leaders and are seeing more support from the new administration. Policy makers need to adhere to seeing that professional learning supports reform implementation for greater success with the implementation. Professional development is seen positively but needs sufficient funding and support to be productive.

Recommendations

1. Policy makers should fully fund mandates for a successful reform implementation.
2. Georgia elementary school principals should be involved in writing any mandates for education reform.

3. Further research should be conducted to assess changes in current reform as well as the principals’ role perceptions of the transition period.

4. Research should be conducted to assess the negative effect of school ratings and sanctions. Both monetary and professional support should be provided for those underperforming schools.

5. Policy makers should investigate the use of high-stakes testing versus using a variety of assessments to report student performance. The more information educators gather on students may be more productive in showing progress in student achievement.

Concluding Thoughts

Accountability is not a new idea to educators today but it has moved to the forefront with policy makers mandating education reform movements across the country. Accountability is clearly publicized, but it is not as clear who should be accountable, what they should be accountable for, how those accountable will be judged and who will make decisions. Standards, assessments, comparison of students, schools and systems are among the pieces within many accountability movements. Changes to schools and systems are based on the data collected along with promises of rewards and sanctions. School reform continues to evolve. A principal’s role as building administrator is impacted by these mandates and should have continued research as policy makers continue to revise and pass education reform.
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Advancing Education, Inc.


APPENDICES
**APPENDIX A**

**Georgia Elementary Principals’ Role Perceptions Survey**

This survey is intended to measure your reactions to components of the A+ Education Reform Act of 2000. The data will be used for research purposes only. Participation is optional, and there is no penalty should you decide not to complete the questionnaire, but your responses are very important to the quality of this study. Completion of this questionnaire will indicate your permission to use these data. Your responses will remain confidential and all data will be aggregates so no individual can be identified. Thank you for your assistance with this important study.

If you have any questions about this research project, please call Beth Newton at (706) 595-3820. If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant in this study, they should be directed to the Georgia Southern University IRB Coordinator at the Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs at (912) 681-5465.

**Demographic Information:**
Please complete the following items by placing a number (items 1-2) or an “X” (items 3-6) in the appropriate blank.

1. I have been a principal for _______ year(s).
2. I plan to remain a principal for ________ year(s).
3. Age:
   - under 35 ______
   - 35 – 45 ______
   - 46 – 55 ______
   - 56+ ______
4. Gender:
   - Male ______
   - Female ______
5. Educational Level:
   - M. Ed. ______
   - Ed. S ______
   - Ed. D/Ph. D. ______
6. School Community served:
   - Urban ______
   - Suburban ______
   - Rural ______
**Principals’ General Perceptions**

Circle the number that indicates the degree of your agreement with the following statements:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Don’t Know</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7. I understand the A+ Education Reform Act of 2000 as it pertains to my role as building principal.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. I possess adequate skills to address conflict resolution within council meetings involving different stakeholder groups.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. I believe involving teachers in decision making will improve student performance</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. I believe using “High-stakes testing” will improve student performance.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Principals’ Evaluation Of Specific Components of the A+ Education Reform Act of 2000**

11. Listed below are several components of A+. For each component, indicate by circling the appropriate number indicating how valuable you believe the component would contribute to overall school functioning. For each component (A-L) indicate if you have received district level support.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Components</th>
<th>Your Perceptions of A+ Components</th>
<th>Have you received district support for this component?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Valuable</td>
<td>Little Value</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. School Councils</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Reduction in pupil-teacher ratio</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. EIP/REP models (delivery methods using additional teachers)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Extra days for remedial instruction (20)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. Principals’ teaching days</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Valuable</td>
<td>Little Value</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F. Technology proficiency for certificate renewal for all personnel</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G. Composite school ratings (A-F)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H. Rewards for “A” and “B” ratings</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. Sanctions for “D” and “F” ratings</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J. Increases in student assessment</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K. Mandatory local staff development</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L. Inclusion of teachers’ assessment of their principals as a component of principals’ evaluations</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

12. How will A+ influence the way you manage your roles and responsibilities as a building principal?
13. How do you feel about involving different stakeholder groups in decision-making as it relates to student performance?

14. How has the A+ legislation made your role more political, if at all?
15. If you could amend A+ legislative components, what suggestions would you offer?
APPENDIX B

Georgia Elementary Principals’ Role Perceptions Survey - Revised

This survey is intended to measure your reactions to components of The A+ Education Reform Act of 2000. The data will be used for research purposes only. Participation is optional, and there is no penalty should you decide not to complete the questionnaire, but your responses are very important to the quality of this study. Completion of this questionnaire will indicate your permission to use these data. Your responses will remain confidential and all data will be aggregated so no individual can be identified. Thank you for your assistance with this important study.

If you have any questions about this research project, please call Beth Newton at (706) 595-3820. If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant in this study, they should be directed to the Georgia Southern University IRB Coordinator at the Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs at (912) 681-5465.

Demographic Information:
Please complete the following items by placing a number (items 1-2) or an “X” (items 3-6) in the appropriate blank.

1. I have been a principal for _______ year(s).

2. I plan to remain a principal for ________ year(s).

3. Age: ________

4. Gender:
   Male
   Female

5. Educational Level:
   M. Ed. __________
   Ed. S __________
   Ed. D/Ph. D. __________

6. School Community served:
   Urban __________
   Suburban __________
   Rural __________
Principals’ General Perceptions
Circle the number that indicates the degree of your agreement with the following statements:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7. I understand the A+ Education Reform Act of 2000 as it pertains to my role as building principal.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. I possess adequate skills to address conflict resolution within council meetings involving different stakeholder groups.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. I believe involving teachers in decision making will improve student performance</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. I believe using “High-stakes testing” will improve student performance.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


11. Listed below are several components of the A+ Education Reform Act of 2000. For each component, indicate by circling the appropriate number indicating how valuable you believe the component would contribute to overall school functioning.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Components</th>
<th>Very Valuable</th>
<th>Valuable</th>
<th>Little Value</th>
<th>No Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. School Councils</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Reduction in pupil-teacher ratio</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. EIP/REP models (delivery methods using additional teachers)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>3</td>
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<td>E. Technology proficiency for certificate renewal for all personnel</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Very Valuable</td>
<td>Valuable</td>
<td>Little Value</td>
<td>No Value</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F. Composite school ratings (A-F)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G. Rewards for “A” and “B” ratings</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<td>I. Increases in student assessment</td>
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<td>K. Inclusion of teachers’ assessment of their principals as a component of principals’ evaluations</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

12. How will the A+ Education Reform Act of 2000 influence the way you manage your roles and responsibilities as a building principal?
13. How do you feel about involving different stakeholder groups in decision making as it relates to student performance?

14. How has the new administration for Georgia changed or affected your role as principal as you continue to carry out A+ components?
15. If you could amend the A+ legislative components, what suggestions would you offer?
APPENDIX C

State Superintendent Cox Endorsement Letter

Georgia Department of Education
Office of the State Superintendent of Schools
Twin Towers East
Atlanta, Georgia 30334-5001
(404) 656-2800  Fax (404) 651-8737
www.doe.k12.ga.us

March 22, 2004

Mrs. Beth Newton, Assistant Principal
Thomson Elementary School
409 Guil Street
Thomson, Georgia 30824

Dear Mrs. Newton:

Thank you for contacting me about your proposed research for your thesis on the role perception of elementary principals after the implementation of HB 1187. I agree that this type of research could be useful to educators as well as legislators in our state.

Please accept this letter in support of your efforts in researching this topic, and I wish you great success on your thesis.

Sincerely,

Kathy Cox

KC/kg
APPENDIX D

Permission Letter from Dr. Wright

From: awirght@ccboe.net
To: <newtonb@mcduffie.k12.ga.us>
Date: 3/14/2003 8:47:14 AM
Subject: dissertation

Dear Ms. Newton:
I am very flattered that you wish to use the survey instrument that I developed for exploring Georgia Elementary Principals' opinions on accountability issues as outlined in the A+ Education Reform Act of 2000 within your dissertation. You certainly have permission to use any or all parts of the survey for your study.

Best of luck with your endeavor. I would be interested to see the results of your research.

Respectfully,

Amy Z. Wright
Dear Principal,

I am currently an assistant principal in McDuffie County and a doctoral student at Georgia Southern University. As part of my dissertation I would like to conduct a survey regarding Georgia elementary principals’ perceptions of some of the components of the A+ Education Reform Act of 2000. Georgia State Superintendent, Cathy Cox, has endorsed this project.

Your response is very important in creating a profile of the perceptions of elementary principals having implemented such a comprehensive educational reform movement in the state of Georgia. Your responses are valuable in that principals were not provided extensive opportunities to provide input into the initial formulation of the A+ Education Reform Act of 2000. Additionally, your responses will be compared to baseline data gathered from a previous study on role perceptions of elementary principals during initial implementation of the A+ Education Reform Act of 2000.

There will be no penalty for nonparticipation. You may refuse to respond to the survey, or withdraw from the study at any time. Completion of the survey should take no longer than 20 minutes of your time.

Please do not identify yourself on the survey. It will be necessary for the researcher to document those responding to the survey in order to contact those not responding. After surveys are received and further contact is handled as needed, all coding required for tracking will be destroyed. Coding is used to ensure the researcher is the only one with participant identification. As the researcher, I assure you that all responses will be treated with utmost confidentiality. Your response indicates that you permit me to use your answers in the study.
You may contact me regarding questions about the study at my office (706) 595-3820, or at my home (706) 595-2917. If you have questions about your rights as a survey participant in this study, please contact the Georgia Southern University IRB Coordinator at the Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs at (912) 681-5465.

Thank you in advance for your swift response. Please use the self-addressed, stamped envelope to return the survey. Feel free to contact me concerning survey results.

**Title of Project:** Perceptions of Georgia Elementary Principals in Relation to Education Reform and the A+ Education Reform Act of 2000

Principal Investigator: Beth C. Newton  
603 Beechwood Dr.  
Thomson, GA  30824  
newtonb@mcduffie.k12.ga.us

Faculty Advisor: Dr. James Burnham  
P.O. Box 8131  
Statesboro, GA  30460  
jburnham@georgiasouthern.edu

Appreciatively,

Beth C. Newton  
Assistant Principal  
409 Guill St.  
Thomson Elementary School  
Thomson, GA  30824
APPENDIX F

Study Participant Follow-up Post Card

Dear Principal,

I recently sent you a survey (gold) on Georgia elementary principals' perceptions of the A+ Education Reform Act of 2000. I trust you felt a need to respond. Your input is important and vital to my study. If you have already completed and mailed the survey, thank you for your support. If you have not already done so, I would greatly appreciate your assistance. Please contact me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Beth Newton
Dear Principal,

HELP! I recently sent you a survey for a study I am conducting on elementary principals’ perceptions of Education Reform and the A+ Education Reform Act of 2000. I desperately need your response so that my study may be completed. I am currently an assistant principal in McDuffie County and a doctoral student at Georgia Southern University. Georgia State Superintendent, Cathy Cox, has endorsed this project.

Your response is very important in creating a profile of the perceptions of elementary principals having implemented such a comprehensive educational reform movement in the state of Georgia. Your responses are valuable in that principals were not provided extensive opportunities to provide input into the initial formulation of the A+ Education Reform Act of 2000. Additionally, your responses will be compared to baseline data gathered from a previous study on role perceptions of elementary principals during initial implementation of the A+ Education Reform Act of 2000.

There will be no penalty for nonparticipation. You may refuse to respond to the survey, or withdraw from the study at any time. Completion of the survey should take no longer than 20 to 30 minutes of your time.

Please do not identify yourself on the survey. It will be necessary for the researcher document those that respond to the survey in order to contact those not responding. After surveys are received and further contact is handled as needed, all coding required for tracking will be destroyed. Coding is used to ensure the researcher is the only one with participant identification. As the researcher, I assure you that all responses will be
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I look forward to you providing assistance that will enable the study to be considered valuable. Please use the self-addressed, stamped envelope to return the survey. I will be happy to convey survey results with you upon request.

Title of Project: Perceptions of Georgia Elementary Principals in Relation to Education Reform and the A+ Education Reform Act of 2000

Principal Investigator: Beth C. Newton
603 Beechwood Dr.
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newtonb@mcduffie.k12.ga.us

Faculty Advisor: Dr. James Burnham
P.O. Box 8131
Statesboro, GA 30460
jburnham@georgiasouthern.edu

Appreciatively,

Beth Newton
Assistant Principal
Thomson Elementary School.
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I look forward to you providing assistance that will enable the study to be considered valuable. Please use the self-addressed, stamped envelope to return the survey. I will be happy to convey survey results with you upon request.

**Title of Project:** Perceptions of Georgia Elementary Principals in Relation to Education Reform and the A+ Education Reform Act of 2000

Principal Investigator: Beth C. Newton  
603 Beechwood Dr.  
Thomson, GA  30824  
newtonb@mcduffie.k12.ga.us

Faculty Advisor: Dr. James Burnham  
P.O. Box 8131  
Statesboro, GA  30460  
jburnham@georgiasouthern.edu

Appreciatively,

Beth Newton  
Assistant Principal  
Thomson Elementary School
Georgia Southern University
Office of Research Services & Sponsored Programs

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Phone: 912-681-5465
Fax: 912-681-0719

To: Beth Newton
   903 Beechwood Dr.
   Thomson, GA 30824

cc: Dr. James Burnham, Faculty Advisor
    P. O. Box 8131

From: Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs
      Administrative Support Office for Research Oversight Committees
      (IACUC/IRB/IRB)

Date: October 26, 2004

Subject: Status of Application for Approval to Utilize Human Subjects in Research

After a review of your proposed research project numbered H05044, and titled “Perceptions of Georgia Elementary Principals in Relation to Education Reform and the A+ Education Reform Act of 2000”, it appears that (1) the research subjects are at minimal risk, (2) appropriate safeguards are planned, and (3) the research activities involve only procedures which are allowable.

Therefore, as authorized in the Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects, I am pleased to notify you that the Institutional Review Board has approved your proposed research.

This IRB approval is in effect for one year from the date of this letter. If at the end of that time, there have been no changes to the research protocol, you may request an extension of the approval period for an additional year. In the interim, please provide the IRB with any information concerning any significant adverse event, whether or not it is believed to be related to the study, within five working days of the event. In addition, if a change or modification of the approved methodology becomes necessary, you must notify the IRB Coordinator prior to initiating any such changes or modifications. At that time, an amended application for IRB approval may be submitted. Upon completion of your data collection, you are required to complete a Research Study Termination form to notify the IRB Coordinator, so your file may be closed.

Sincerely,

Julie B. Cole
Director of Research Services and Sponsored Programs