DECISION MAKING UNDER MULTIPLE ACCOUNTABILITY POLICIES: A STUDY OF
GENESEE COUNTY'S HIGH SCHOOL LEADERS

By

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ABSTRACT

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This study sought to understand which aspects of current school accountability measures cause high school principals the most concern and what specific actions they were taking to address their concerns. This study took place in Genesee County Michigan. The primary method of data collection was semi-structured interviews. Thirteen traditional high school principals participated in the study.

Building leaders identified the top concerns with current school accountability measures they face. Fifty-eight concerns were identified by participants in this study. The 58 concerns were combined into 12 overall concerns. Adequate Yearly Progress stood out as the primary concern of high school principals. Concerns with the Michigan Merit Curriculum and Michigan Merit Exam closely followed. The three concerns AYP, MMC, and MME comprised the top concerns identified in this study that were shared by nearly all participants. Mid-level concerns were comprised of Highly Qualified Status, Graduation Rate, School Improvement, and Education Yes!

Following the identification of these building leaders concerns, participants were asked to identify what actions they had taken to address their concerns. These actions were coded into six categories: course and curriculum changes; development of teachers; instructional targeting, development, and assessment; interventions; leadership; and organizational structure and management.

This study showed that policy has been effective at prompting action within schools. The federal NCLB and state Education Yes! policies have gotten high school principals to take action directed at various aspects of these policies. An interesting finding of this study is that policy has created a situation where building leaders are more prone to take action to address their concerns. High school principals, from buildings obtaining a B grade on the Michigan School Report Card took nearly twice as many actions compared to school earning A's, C's, and D's.

Unfortunately the situations that provoked action were not the ones policy would have highlighted. It was very apparent that high school principals in this study are not acting from a deep diagnostic sense of the problems they face. This problem is compounded by participants use of a piecemeal approach coupled with the absence of a strong planning process. Participants were not only uncertain about the effectiveness of the actions they were taking but also relied heavily on neighboring schools to provide for models to emulate.

Overall, this study suggests that while concerns and actions taken by high school principals correspond with policy elements that carried the highest stakes for schools, the actions were not focused on increasing the quality of classroom instruction that high school students receive.

This work is dedicated to my entire family.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In 2002, Congress passed the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). This reauthorization contained the most significant changes to the act since its inception in 1965. A cornerstone of the 2002 reauthorization, commonly referred to as the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, was much stronger school accountability measures for student learning.

Changes in School Accountability

Some key elements of the 2002 NCBL Act were first introduced in the 1994 reauthorization of ESEA, named the Improving America's Schools Act (IASA). That reauthorization introduced the creation of (1) state learning standards in reading/English and math, (2) annual assessment of student learning in reading and math, and (3) the criterion called *adequate yearly progress* (AYP), which measured the percentage of students classified as proficient or above on reading and math learning standards as measured by annual assessments (USDOE, 2004). Each state was able to create its own assessments and to determine its own benchmarks of proficiency, but the Act set all states and schools with the goal of making significant and sustained progress towards the goal of all students be proficient (USDOE, 2004).

The 2002 NCLB Act added to these requirements. It introduced a requirement that all teachers meet a new "highly qualified" training standard and a requirement that schools publish an annual report card highlighting student performances on standardized tests. More pointedly, the 2002 Act introduced a progressive system of

sanctions against schools that did not meet NCLB benchmarks and standards. For instance, a school failing to make AYP for two consecutive years would have to provide supplemental educational services (tutoring) or school transfers to students. After five consecutive years of not making AYP, schools might be sanctioned to replace the governing structure of the school, replace the principal, or even close the school to have it reopen as a charter school.

The federal accountability measures embedded in NCLB presented school leaders with many new pressures and demands. They were not, however, the only new accountability measures bearing down on them. State legislatures were also designing and implementing new accountability systems. For example, in 2002, as a direct result of the NCLB Act the state of Michigan created and implemented a new accountability system named Education Yes! The Education Yes! system created school report cards that combined school process and outcome measures into a simple grade, A – F. Seventy percent of a school's report card grade derived from student reading and math scores on the annual Michigan Educational Assessment Program (known as the MEAP tests). The remaining 30% derived from a school's self-assessment of various school improvement processes, such as: vision and purpose; governance and leadership; teaching and learning; documenting and using results; resource and support systems; stakeholder communications and relationships; and commitment to continuous improvement. Principals understood that marking their buildings low in any of these areas would have a negative impact on their schools' overall Michigan School Report Card Grade, which was frequently reported in the local newspaper along with scores for other schools in the area. School boards, superintendents, and prospective new

students had easy access to Education, Yes! information. These factors put pressure on principals when filling out the self assessment rubrics.

In 2007, Michigan changed its high school assessment from the MEAP, to the Michigan Merit Exam (MME). The MME was composed of three sections: the ACT, the ACT Work Keys test, and content tests aligned to state learning standards in English, math, science, and social studies. Following the creation of the MME, Michigan implemented the Michigan Merit Curriculum (MMC). The new curriculum extended in several disciplines the number of semesters required for graduation with a diploma. Previously, graduation standards were decided upon locally. But the MMC introduced state requirements that all students complete 4 years of mathematics (including a second year of algebra), 3 years of science, 2 years of foreign language study, and an online course (Revised School Code Act, 2006).

In the case of Michigan, then, high school principals' position and responsibilities shifted, in a period of roughly 5 years, from one of primarily answering to their local community to one of being held accountable to federal and state laws addressing curriculum, testing, student learning, graduation requirements and overall school performance (Steptoe, 2006).

Logic of New Accountability Policies

NCLB and Education Yes! have been implemented with the expectation that accountability measures would drive schools to obtain improved outcomes. NCLB and Michigan's Education Yes! legislation were designed to ensure that each school in Michigan re-evaluated its practices to ensure that every student obtained a quality education. The underlying theory was that requiring a Michigan School Report Card

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Grade, for every building and district, would create local pressure on schools to improve. Mandating the reporting of performance of students in subgroups would force schools to focus on ensuring that every student's academic achievement reached the same level (MDE, 2010b). Michigan went one step further with the adoption of the Michigan Merit Curriculum, which was intended to prepare all students for college or work readiness (MDE, 2010a). Taken together, these laws required all high schools in Michigan to change their expectations in all aspects of schooling in order to reach these new standards.

These new accountability policies were very effective at applying pressure on high school principals. Unfortunately, the plans of many principals to immediately increase either demonstrated student achievement or standing on school report card grades did not have the intended affect of improving education for all students. Concerns quickly surfaced that some schools were engaged in: using discipline to push out low-performing students, turning schools into test preparation factories, and engaging in strategic gamesmanship to side-step many of the requirements (Darling-Hammond, 2004).

A prime example of how accountability measures can corrupt schooling is the "Miracle in Texas" (Leung, 2004). Texas had accountability policies that served as a model for the NCLB Act. Under the Texas policy, the Houston public schools (between 2001 and 2002) reported drop-out rates of 1.5%. A state audit, however, revealed troubling discrepancies. An audit of half the high school records showed that 3000 students who left the district should also have been counted as drop-outs (Leung). The reporting bias was viewed as a direct result of the pressures placed on districts and

schools by the new policies. Critics fear that, faced with increasing demands to meet higher student outcomes each year, leaders will feel compelled to produce desired results, real or not.

Problem Statement

As new pressures have accumulated, concerns have multiplied as to how school leaders at various levels of the education system are responding to NCLB and other accountability policies (Barnett, 2004). To begin, the policies put direct pressures on school leaders to act as effective leaders of school and instructional improvement. Traditionally, principals were primarily acting as managers. As such, their main responsibilities centered on setting goals, allocating resources, managing the curriculum, monitoring curriculum, and evaluating teachers (DiPaola & Hoy, 2008). New accountability measures called on principals to act as instructional leaders focusing on improving teaching and learning, using data to make decisions, and prescribing and participating in meaningful professional development (King, 2002). Presumably in an attempt to find individuals with a differing set of skills, Michigan eliminated school administrator certification. Michigan was one of only two states, at the time of this study that did not require administrative certification (Ivers, 2008). Since the conclusion of this study, Michigan has reinstated administrative certification.

Researchers considering responses to NCLB have utilized bounded rationality models to examine leadership decisions (Meier, Kohn, Darling-Hammond, Sizer, & Wood, 2004). These models assume decision makers -- in this case, school leaders -- face major limitations in (1) access to relevant information and (2) existence of reliable strategies from which they might choose (March, 1994). According to this model,

decision makers rely heavily on local knowledge and gravitate toward strategies that are the least disruptive to the existing structure of the organization (Gross & Supovitz, 2005). That is, school principals are not likely to engage in exhaustive reviews of the school reform literature looking for comprehensive strategies. Instead, they will settle for surface level interventions and interventions they see used in neighbor districts.

The new measures present many potential action and value conflicts to school leaders. High school principals may face a particularly difficult web of competing demands. School boards and superintendents often respond to NCLB and related measures by pressuring building principals to increase student achievement (Vitaska, 2008). While most educators believe that long-term systemic change is what is most needed in schools, accountability systems often reward high target actions that yield quick results, such as teaching students test-taking strategies. Principals may find themselves in situations where they feel pressured to implement the most expedient rather than the most effective solution. For example, researchers have documented how accountability policies can influence how principals allocate academic support and assistance. Students may be divided into "safe cases" -– those students who should perform well on tests, "target cases" -– students who, with additional assistance stand a good chance of meeting performance measures, and "hopeless cases" -– students deemed unlikely to benefit from additional assistance to a level that would allow them to meet proficiency standards (Gen Net Principals, personal communications, 2008). Resources are directed to students in the first two categories, while students considered "hopeless" may not be provided with additional support and may even be encouraged to attend an alternative high school or to be home schooled. Other sufficing tactics noted

include redistributing courses and study time, aligning course content directly to tests, "pushing out" students likely to lower outcomes, or other tactical efforts to produce good test scores (Gross & Supovitz, 2005).

The goals of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and NCLB may come into conflict if and when a special education subgroup is unlikely to reach AYP benchmarks. As the percentage of proficient students required for AYP increases, schools, with few exceptions, must also increase the achievement scores of their special education students. Depending on the type and degree of disabilities present, these benchmarks, while commendable, may be in conflict with the goals and objectives articulated in the students' Individualized Education Plans (IEP). For example, in 2005, the Illinois State Board of Education and two Illinois school districts filed suit, the first of its kind, against the United States Department of Education (Pascopella, 2005). The lawsuit sought to declare any section(s) of NCLB in conflict with IDEA invalid. While the lawsuits did not prevail, the conflict between meeting the individual needs of special education students and meeting AYP remains and grows as the percentage of students needing to meet proficiency climbs to 100% in 2014.

New York City provides an example of conflict between improving overall student achievement and improving achievement specifically as it impacts AYP. For example, one requirement of NCLB is that all schools publish report cards and that a portion of the report card must be based on student achievement. In an effort to reach this AYP requirement, Joel Klein, New York City's Chancellor, based 55% of one component of high schools' student achievement grade on the percentage of courses that students pass (Bennett, 2007). A local policy, referred to as "seat-time credit," allowed students

who failed a class to complete a project for another teacher and have the failing grade revised. The two policies together - NCLB and that of the New York City schools, constituted "a conflict of interest in that it invites - nearly forces - schools to grant kids credit when credit is not due" (Bennett, 2007). Since the implementation of NCLB, the number of New York City schools reaching AYP benchmarks has risen; however, during the same time frame, performance on the National Education Achievement Program (NEAP) assessments has remained unchanged.

In addition, some strategies for improving outcomes measured by new accountability policies may also conflict with what parents and communities desire for their children's education. Quite simply, some parents do not want their child held to Michigan's high standards. They believe that their local school did a good job educating them and they turned out fine. These parents do not see the point in requiring their child to successfully complete a second year of algebra as well as chemistry or physics. Another conflict that frequently arises occurs when students, due to the increased requirements, are unable to take elective courses. Many students who struggle and have to retake courses or are being placed in support classes to help with required core classes are unable to take elective courses that may more closely relate to their goal of post-secondary employment (Gen Net Principals, personal communication, 2009)

Research Purpose and Questions

In an effort to meet continually rising accountability standards, high school principals may find themselves in the precarious position of having to prioritize their concerns resulting from the current school accountability measures they face, decide what actions they are going to take in response to their concerns, and manage conflicts

between what they believe is best, in the long term, for their students, schools, and communities and what will produce the outcomes demanded by new accountability policies. Current school improvement laws, both federal and state, coupled with the resulting regulations have not only highlighted a multitude of areas in need of improvement but also have changed the traditional role of the high school principal from manager to instructional leader. Based on the high number of potential areas to focus on, high school principals have to prioritize the areas that are of most concern to them and their schools. Paramount to any discussion about the effectiveness of federal and state school accountability policies is understanding the actual impact within schools. The impact of these policies can be observed by identifying the actions principals took in response to their concerns.

The purpose of this study is to investigate how high school principals in Genesee County, Michigan, responded to the joint implementation of accountability policies demanded by both federal NCLB and state Education Yes! policies. The study sought to understand how principals navigated and prioritized the demands and pressures of multiple policies by identifying and categorizing their key concerns and the types of actions they took in response. The study also sought to understand conflicts between these actions and personal and professional beliefs of these principals concerning what was best for the students in their care.

Specific research questions were:

1. How are high school principals prioritizing pressures from multiple accountability policies? Are some policies having much more influence on high school principals' actions than others?

2. What school improvement actions have high school principals taken in response to these policy driven concerns? How might these actions be categorized and understood in terms of their affects on core elements of school organization?

3. Does this data suggest that high school leaders are developing clear and/or common approaches to school improvement as a result of new policy pressures?

Context

Genesee County, Michigan's fifth most populated county, is located in the southeastern portion of Michigan. Within its 649 square miles are urban, suburban, and rural communities. The county has a mix of high and low socio-economic districts as well as a mix of highly homogeneous and highly diverse districts in terms of student racial and ethnic composition. This eclectic mixture of communities all face the same federal mandate to increase student achievement.

The county seat, and once the economic center of the county, is the city of Flint. Flint was once a bustling center of the automotive industry. At the time of this study in December 2009, the unemployment rate for the greater Flint area was 11.1%, the highest among metropolitan areas in Michigan. Michigan itself holds the dubious distinction as the state with the highest unemployment rate in the nation (Turner, 2011).

Genesee County's 436,000 residents are predominately white (75.3%) or African American (20.4%). The leading industries in the county are manufacturing (24.1%), education, health, and social services (21.1%), and retail trade (21.8%). The median household income for the county is just under $42,000. While these statistics show a

fairly moderate portrait of county residents, individual difference among cities and towns vary greatly. This variation comes in large part due to the greater number of people living in the city and small urban suburbs of Flint compared to outlying communities.

While the cities range from the highest ethnic diversity of 41.4% white and 53.3% African American to the lowest with 98.5% white and 0.2% African American, the schools are somewhat different because some cities and towns have multiple school districts within their boundaries as well as schools of choice (U.S. Census, 2000). The extremes of diversity within school districts range from having a student population consisting of 7% white and 88% African American to 97% white and 0.7% African American (GISD, 2009a).

Median household incomes in cities within the county range from a low of $28,000 to a high of $54,000 (U.S. Census, 2002). This information tells part of the story. One city in the county includes 8% of the households that earn more than $200 thousand a year. A rural city in the county has no household making more than $200 thousand a year and only 6 families making more than $150 thousand a year.

Justification and Significance

The focus of many studies of accountability policies (primarily NCLB) has been their potential influences on student achievement on standardized tests (Dee & Jacob, 2009; Leopold, 2011; Sunderman, 2004a; USDOE, 2006). This study examines instead how the rapid emergence of multiple accountability policies is influencing high school principals' actions. To date, many case studies have targeted one accountability policy or one school. This study develops a picture of how thirteen principals in a single county have navigated multiple policies, allowing us to consider the nature of actions taken and

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to determine if significant patterns of action are taking shape. Further, the study considers whether leaders face conflicts between responses they feel they must take to meet new pressures and their professional values regarding what they feel is best for their schools and students.

Definition of Terms

No Child Left Behind is a reauthorization (2001) of the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965. Use of the term NCLB refers to a set of core measures, including AYP, school report cards, subgroup creation and reporting, and sanctions.

Adequate Yearly Progress is one of the cornerstones of the No Child Left Behind Act. For Michigan high schools, AYP is calculated for each school using data on achievement (status, change, and growth), as well as graduation rates. Achievement status measures how well a school is doing on educating its students. Achievement change measures whether student achievement is improving or declining. Achievement growth measures whether students are obtaining at least one year of academic growth during a school year. The final requirement is an 85% graduation rate for high schools (MDE, 2008b).

Graduation Rates beginning in 2007 were calculated by tracking individual students who first enrolled in ninth grade in fall 2003, and graduated four years later with a regular diploma. This method uses a freshman cohort to determine the graduation rate (MDE, 2008b).

Highly Qualified teachers are required to have either a college major or minor in each subject area they teach or pass a state subject area test to demonstrate

competency in each area. Michigan allowed for some existing teachers to utilize a portfolio option to demonstrate competency.

Michigan Merit Curriculum (MMC) was crafted by the state legislature in 2006, increasing the state graduation requirements from 0.5 to 16 credits in specific areas beginning with the class of 2011. Formerly, credit requirements for students could vary from district to district; the only state requirement was a successfully completed civics course. The MMC requires all students to earn 4 credits of English, 4 credits of math (Algebra, Geometry, Algebra II, and a math class in the final year), 3 credits of science (Biology and Chemistry or Physics), and 3 social studies credits (World History, Economics, Civics, and U.S. History) (Revised School Code, 2006). The new curriculum meant that high schools had to support many more students to successfully complete more academic courses than in the past.

Michigan Merit Exam replaced the MEAP test for high school students in 2007. The test is comprised of the ACT test, portions of the ACT Work Keys test, and Michigan specific content tests in math, English, science, and social studies. This test is used by the Michigan department of Education to determine a school's AYP status.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The review of literature is divided into four sections. It begins with a review of policy as a lever to change in education and a review of the basic logics of accountability policies. In this section, current policy directions are noted, including shifting policy foci from access and inputs to outcomes. It then discusses more specifically the Federal No Child Left Behind policy (NCLB), including its policies and impacts. Michigan's Ed Yes! accountability program, enacted as a response to new federal rules, is then examined. The chapter concludes with an overview of the role of high school principals in schools and communities.

Levers and Accountability

Policy as a Lever

The United States Constitution and corresponding Supreme Court decisions have provided much of the foundation for federal involvement in schools. Throughout the 1900s, legislative policy has been an increasingly popular means of influencing education.

The U.S. constitution has both excluded and encouraged federal involvement in schools. The 10th amendment to the U.S. constitution sets aside all powers not given to the federal government to state government. Since education is not specifically mentioned in the constitution, it is considered a state function. The 14th amendment to the constitution, however, has been the foundation for federal involvement in schools. This amendment encompasses both due process and equal protection rights. Due

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process ensures the fair and equitable treatment of teachers and students within schools. Equal protection prohibits the discrimination of individuals based on race, ethnicity, national origin, or gender.

The U.S. Supreme Court has utilized the 14th amendment to assert constitutional amendments on schools. Examples include 1st amendment rights concerning free speech, assembly, and religion; 4th amendment rights concerning search and seizure; and 8th amendment rights concerning cruel and unusual punishment. Perhaps most notably, in 1954, the United States Supreme Court ruled that the 14th amendment applied to schools with their decision in the landmark case, *Brown vs. The Board of Education*. This decision struck down the practice of separate but equal schooling and called for the integration of public schools. A slew of federal laws followed, aimed, for the most part, at ensuring equal access to education. The United States Code now contains statutes covering age discrimination (1967); equal access (viewpoint discrimination, 1984); family educational rights to privacy (confidentiality of student records, 1974); individuals with disabilities (discrimination of people with disabilities who receive special education services, 1975); section 504 of the rehabilitation act 1973 (discrimination of people with disabilities); title VII 1(discrimination of people based on race, religion, gender, or national origin, 1964); and title IX (discrimination of people based on gender, 1972) (Dennis, 2000).

Direct federal involvement also dramatically increased with President Johnson's enactment of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) in 1965. The cornerstone of ESEA was Title I, which provided financial resources to schools for the

targeted assistance of poor and minority students. Between 1965 and the 1990s, the aim of this federal policy was compensatory education and supplementing resources for specific student populations, i.e., low income, minority and non-English language speakers (Marshall, 2011). These policies shifted attention from the basic problem of getting students to school, toward the challenges of equalizing schooling inputs and processes. One marker of this progression was a number of school finance cases which declared some state finance systems unconstitutional on the grounds that they did not assure a minimum standard of resources to all schools (Koski, 2011). Another was the 1983 National Commission on Excellence in Education report, *Nation at Risk,* which highlighted perceived failings of American schools. This report contained recommendations for policies to improve educational productivity and efficiency through stronger standards and expectations (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). The recommendations focused on adoption of more rigorous curriculum standards for all students, higher standards for the teaching profession and changes to school organizations. In the ensuing years, many states began enacting policies presented in the report (Sunderman, 2009).

The 1990s signaled a new transition in educational policy attention from a focus on inputs and processes to pressuring greater scrutiny of schooling outcomes. For example, the 1994 reauthorization of ESEA was named the Improving America's Schools Act. The Act (IASA) mandated not only that states develop challenging learning standards for all students but moved to hold schools accountable for student achievement through a measure of adequate yearly progress (AYP) (Sunderman, 2004b). Few states made substantive progress meeting the goals of IASA, for which

there was no real monitoring or accountability mechanism. This laid the groundwork for the NCLB Act which was to follow it (Sunderman, 2009).

Accountability Policies

From ESEA's inception until the 1980s, federal and state involvement in educational policies aimed at helping schools improve focus on inputs. During this time, educational policy sought to provide greater resources for disadvantaged students. By providing increased resources, education policy sought to increase intrinsic motivation of both students and teachers. If teachers had the right amount of resources, they could meet the unique needs of all students. If intrinsic motivation was not successful, then identified motivation would work. Identified motivation occurs when a person willingly chooses to perform a behavior despite the fact that the behavior is not intrinsically motivating to them. In theory, this is easy, since people have a natural tendency to take in the values promoted by their mentors and authorities (Sheldon & Biddle, 1998). Unfortunately, demonstrated student achievement on state and national assessments proved to be non-responsive to educational policies aimed at increasing resources and relying on intrinsic or identified motivation (Hanushek & Raymond, 2004).

As a result of both the Nation at Risk study (1984) and the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (1995), which highlighted the failings of America's schools, state accountability policies and systems increased during the 1990s. While states, for the most part, developed their own school accountability policies, they held common underlying beliefs: the quality of education was not as good as it should be; student learning needs to be improved; student outcomes rather than process or resource measures should be used to judge school quality; content standards and

associated assessments will make it clear what teachers are expected to teach and students are expected to learn; schools should be held accountable for learning by all their students; holding schools accountable for student achievement will motivate greater effort on the part of teachers and students; and information provided by the accountability system can contribute to improved teaching and learning (Linn, 2005).

Research in early 2000 showed that accountability policies had a positive impact on student achievement. Analysis of data from the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) tests showed that states that had adopted some form of accountability produced, on average, higher student results than states that had not (Hanushek & Raymond, 2003). Carnoy and Loeb (2002) found that black and Hispanic students in states with accountability systems generally improved more than white students on the NAEP 8th grade math test. Early research on accountability policies showed that it was being effective at increasing student achievement, especially with some minority groups that previously had not shown gains.

Expanding on their earlier work analyzing states with accountability systems and results on the NAEP test, Hanusek and Raymond (2004) found that while reporting overall results had minimal impact on school performance, the "force" of accountability policy comes from attaching monetary awards or threats of takeover to school performance. This approach relies on external or introjected motivation from teachers and principals, where external motivation is seen when a person does something largely to obtain a reward or avoid a punishment, whereas introjected motivation is apparent when a person does something to avoid guilt or anxiety. When teachers and principals

are acting as a result of external or "introjected" motivation, unintended consequences to accountability policy are likely to be introduced (Sheldon & Biddle, 1998).

Several rational yet unintended consequences resulted from assessment-based accountability systems. Scholars have pointed out concerns with students being pushed out of school, more students being retained at grade level, increased dropout rates, and narrowing of the curriculum (Meier et al., 2004). There are two ways for schools to affect student achievement: increase the quality of education that students receive or change the composition of students taking the test by removing the low-performing students. There is a growing concern that schools are utilizing some or all of these approaches to produce "gains" in test scores.

The two consequences of pushing students out and narrowing the curriculum will be developed further. Studies have shown that in response to assessment based accountability systems, more schools are likely to retain students whose achievement is below grade level, exclude low-achieving students from admission, and/or encourage students to transfer or drop out if it is thought that these students are not likely to meet proficiency standards (Darling-Hammond, 2007). Studies from Massachusetts, New York, and Texas provide examples of schools that have "raised" test scores while losing large numbers of low-performing students (Darling-Hammond, 2007).

While specific concerns over narrowing the curriculum in high schools exist, a definitive study on the issue does not. A 2004 study from the Center of Educational Policy highlighted the affects of NCLB on curriculum at the elementary level. While 64% of districts require specific instructional time for reading and 53% require specific instructional time for math, 20% of schools have changed their policies to increase

instruction in math reading. On average 94 minutes are devoted to reading and 64 minutes are devoted to math daily (Scott, Kober, Rentner, and Jennings, 2004). This additional time for reading and math instruction is directly correlated to a reduction of time devoted to subjects such as social studies, science, the arts, and physical education. While similar research has not been completed at the secondary level, it may be possible to infer that similar changes in instructional emphasis have occurred.

<div align="center">*History of NCLB*</div>

Introduction

The 2001 No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act was the latest reauthorization of the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965, the previous reauthorization being the Improving America's Schools Act of 1994. Originally, ESEA sought to provide schools with additional funds to provide supplemental services for minority and economically disadvantaged children. NCLB continues this mission, but has greatly increased the federal role in education, insisting that all students reach high levels of proficiency. This has, in part, been accomplished through a comprehensive accountability system and the addition of formal and informal sanctions for schools that fail to meet the expectations set forth in the new law (Hall, 2007).

NCLB strives to overcome a long tradition of states not being held accountable for school performance. The predecessor to NCLB was the 1994 Improving America's Schools Act (IASA), also a reauthorization of ESEA. Much of the framework for NCLB came from IASA. Notably different was the level of attention states paid to this law. Very little was done to enforce the expectations set forth in IASA; no state had federal funds withheld for non-compliance (Kim et al., 2005). A primary obstacle to holding states

accountable is the small percentage of funding for education that comes from Washington, only 7% of the overall education budget; yet, states seem to be complying with NCLB despite occasional grumblings about possibly returning the federal money.

New Requirements

NCLB mandated numerous new requirements for schools. Five prominent new requirements directly affecting high schools are discussed below.

#1 Assessment

The No Child Left Behind Act specified very specific testing guidelines. Excluding students who are exempt through uncontrollable circumstances, i.e., "hurricanes or unforeseen financial resources of the state," proficiency testing of all students in mathematics and reading or language arts is required at least once in grades 3 through 5, grades 6 through 9, and grades 10 through 12 (NCLB, 2002a). Science proficiency testing was required to begin during the 2007-08 school year, at least once in each of the three grade spans noted above. The law also requires the assessments: (1) be the same measurement of achievement for all children, (2) align with the states' challenging content expectations, and (3) involve multiple up-to-date measures of student academic achievement, including measures that assess higher-order thinking skills and understanding (NCLB, 2002a).

#2 Adequate Yearly Progress

Adequate Yearly Progress was first defined by the federal government in the 1994 reauthorization of ESEA titled Improving America's Schools Act. IASA defined AYP:

In a manner that (1) results in continuous and substantial yearly improvement of each school and local education agency sufficient to achieve the goal of all children…meeting the state's proficient and advanced levels of achievement; [and] (2) is sufficiently rigorous to achieve the goal within an appropriate timeframe. (Elmore & Rothman, 1999, p. 85)

The 2002 reauthorization of ESEA, titled No Child Left Behind, greatly expanded on this original definition. NCLB mandated each state to define AYP in a manner that applies the same high standards of academic achievement to all public school students in the State; is statistically valid and reliable; results in continuous and substantial academic improvement for all students; measures the progress of public schools primarily on academic assessments; includes separate measurable annual objectives for continuous and substantial improvement for not only all public school elementary and secondary students, but also further including economically disadvantaged students, students from major racial and ethnic groups, students with disabilities, and students with limited English proficiency (NCLB, 2002a). Additional requirements for AYP under NCLB included using the graduation rate as an academic indicator at the high school level; having separate measures for both reading/language arts and math; and requiring 95% of not only each subgroup but also an entire school be tested each year (Education Week, 2004).

#3 Highly Qualified Staff

One of the cornerstones of the No Child Left Behind Act is that all students be taught by "highly qualified teachers." Highly qualified was defined in the federal legislation to mean that a teacher has (1) earned at a minimum a bachelor's degree; (2) acquired full state certification as a teacher; and (3) has demonstrated subject area competence in each area taught (USDOE, 2002).

Considerable research shows that teachers' content knowledge is directly related to their effectiveness (Haycock & Peske, 2006). Darling-Hammond (2000), Loeb (2000), and Wayne and Youngs (2003) all have confirmed this relationship. The relationship between teacher quality and student achievement is most evident at middle and high school levels. A study from the University of Tennessee illuminated the connection between effective teaching and student achievement. Researchers found that low achieving students gained only 14 points each year on the Tennessee state test when they were taught by the least effective teachers (Haycock & Peske, 2006). When taught by the most effective teachers, low achieving students gained 53 points in the same amount of time.

One problem under-performing school districts, particularly large urban districts, have is recruiting and keeping teachers. This can be seen in the statistic that more than one in every five core academic classes in high poverty schools are taught by teachers who are not certified in the subject(s) that they teach (Almy & Theokas, 2010). Math classes in high poverty schools are twice as likely to be taught by an out-of-field teacher, who is thus not highly qualified by federal standards. Research has shown that students in schools with high percentages of minority students are twice as likely to have a novice teacher as in schools with small populations of minority students (Haycock & Peske, 2006).

The aforementioned research demonstrates that schools need to put the most effective teachers with the neediest students. The issue is more complex than merely hiring highly qualified, enthusiastic teachers. Research shows that individuals who begin their career in high poverty schools frequently leave (in disproportionate numbers) not

only their schools but also the profession (Kim et al., 2005). For real improvement to occur, the combined issues of quality and stability need to be addressed.

#4 Report Cards

NCLB also required states to publish a state report card beginning no later than the 2002-03 school year (NCLB, 2002b). The state report card is supposed to be concise and presented in an understandable uniform format in a language, when practicable, that the parents can understand. Required information consists of (1) aggregate student achievement at each proficiency level disaggregated by race, ethnicity, gender, disability status, migrant status, English proficiency, and economically disadvantaged; (2) comparisons between achievement levels of each group of students; (3) percentage of students not tested disaggregated by the eight same categories; (4) the most recent two-year trend in student achievement in each subject area; (5) aggregate information on any other indicators used by states to determine AYP; (6) high school graduation rates; (7) information on the performance of local educational agencies; (8) and the professional qualification of teachers within the state (NCLB, 2002c).

Also beginning in 2002-03, all the school districts (local educational agencies) are required to generate report cards for the district (NCLB, 2002d). School district report cards must include all of the information required on the state report cards. In addition, districts are required to report the number and percentage of schools identified for improvement as well as the number of years the school(s) have failed to make AYP (NCLB, 2002d). Districts must also compare their student achievement data to statewide assessment data. Individual school report cards include all of the above

information along with achievement comparisons to other schools in the district. School report cards must also include comparisons to the state on the other indicators used to determine AYP.

#5 Sanctions

This section will consider sanctions designated in the NCLB as a method of encouraging change. Policy by its very nature is ill-suited to change actual classroom practices. Policy can, however, influence teaching practices through individuals such as principals and agencies such as state departments of education (Ladd, 2001). A brief examination of how sanctions can be used as a lever for change will follow. This section concludes by considering the impact of sanctions on individual schools.

The most significant sanctions in NCLB are applied when schools fail to make AYP. As shown in Table 2.1, there are 36 ways that schools can fail to make AYP based on achievement testing.

It is also important to note that schools are also held accountable for two additional measures: at the elementary and middle school levels attendance rates must be calculated and at the high school level graduation rates must be calculated. Meeting the required levels on these two criteria is also required for each of the nine categories listed in Table 2.1, bringing the total number of ways that a school can fail to make AYP at each grade assessed to 45.

Once a school fails to make AYP for two consecutive years, it is obligated to implement certain sanctions (NCLB, 2002e). Since these programs often involve changing the decision making structure within a school, they are frequently referred to as restructuring options. It is important to note that schools do not have to "fail" in the

Table 2.1

Matrix of AYP Requirements

	Math Participation	Reading or ELA Participation	Math Proficiency	Reading or ELA Proficiency
All Students				
High Poverty				
Asian				
Black				
Hispanic				
Native American				
White				
Students with Disabilities				
Limited English Proficiency				

same content area or even the same subgroup for two years before sanctions are applied. For example, if Asian students failed to make AYP in mathematics one year and special education students failed to make AYP in reading the subsequent year, the school have to begin implementing the required sanctions. See Table 2.2 for the progression of sanctions.

Any school receiving Title I funding that fails to make AYP for two consecutive years is labeled "identified for improvement". Once this designation is obtained, the school must spend 20% of its Tile I funding on a combination of two programs. The two

Table 2.2

No Child Left Behind School Improvement Sanctions for Schools Receiving Title I Funds

First Year	Second Year	Third Year	Fourth Year	Fifth Year
Did not make Adequate Yearly Progress	Did not make Adequate Yearly Progress	School must offer supplemental educational services and/or transfer option	Corrective action	Restructuring

 programs described in detail below are supplemental educational services and transfer

options. While 20% of a school's title one funding must be spent on these two

programs, it is somewhat up to the school on how to allocate the funding. The only

requirement is that no less than 5% of the funding may be spent on either (USDOE,

2005).

Transfer option. The federal government's interest in school choice can be traced

back to President Clinton's Improving America's School Act. The idea behind school

choice is to provide low-income families the kind of choice that white suburban families

have when they choose their schools by where they decide to live (Kim et al., 2005).

IASA gave school districts the ability to use Title I money to fund intra-district choice

programs (Kim & Sunderman, 2004a). This aspect of IASA, for the most part, went

unnoticed. Federal legislatures, realizing the potential of school choice to help bridge

both the racial and economic gaps, greatly expanded school choice programs under

NCLB. When a Title I school fails to make AYP for two years, the school district <u>must</u> do

the following: (1) offer students who are enrolled in the school the option to transfer to

other schools in the district that are not identified for improvement, on a space-available basis; (2) provide or pay for transportation for students who choose the transfer option, within certain cost limits; and (3) give priority to the lowest-achieving students from low-income families if there is not enough space available in non-identified schools or funds to cover transportation costs.

The final Title I regulations stated that if a district does not have the capacity to transfer these students, then it must either create additional capacity or provide a choice of other school districts. (Kim et al., 2005). New York schools applied this literal approach and approved 8000 transfers resulting in massive overcrowding in some schools. New York legislators quickly passed legislation to prevent this from recurring (Kim & Sunderman, 2005).

For districts that do not have the ability to provide intra-district choice, either for lack of other schools in the same grade span or lack of space at other schools, districts are charged with providing choice options in neighboring school districts. There are numerous obstacles to achieving this vision. First, in some states, such as Michigan, school finance is tied directly to individual students. If a student leaves a school district then so does the funding for that child. As a result, districts have a disincentive to attempt to create transfer options for students to attend another district. Second, there is nothing that requires neighboring districts to take these students. In fact, districts may not want to take students from "failing" schools, as these students are frequently viewed as a threat to their own AYP status (Mathews, 2003).

The reality of school choice, under NCLB, is that it will have minimal meaningful impact. The absence of strong schools with space in or near large urban districts is a

huge obstacle to real choice (Kim et al., 2005). In reality, the only transfer option for many students may be a school marginally better than the one they were attending. It is also important to note that, according to research, parents use factors other than student achievement when selecting schools. Considerations such as day care, convenience, social factors, and sports play a strong role when parents choose a school (NCREL, 2003).

Supplemental educational services. If a school does not make AYP for two years, the second sanction to impact schools is the requirement to provide supplemental educational services (SES). The law defines SES as "additional academic instruction designed to increase the academic achievement of students in low-performing schools" and indicates that it "must be high quality, research-based, and specifically designed to increase student achievement" (Kim et al., 2005). NCLB goes on to state that SES programs must be provided outside the normal school day and may not be provided by the school identified for improvement.

SES programs are used more frequently than transfer options for two reasons: (1) the school does not lose enrollment and resulting state funding for a student under this system and (2) additional programs/tutoring are generally thought to enhance the efforts of the local school (Lecher, 2005). It should be noted, however, that when NCLB was written there was no research-based evidence that supplemental services were effective. SES programs are a logical intervention that lack the rigorous scientific research mentioned in the law (Slavin, 2006).

Section 1116(b)(7)(C) of the No Child Left Behind Act outlines corrective actions for schools that fail to make AYP by the end of the second school year after

identification under paragraph one of section 1111 (NCLB, 2002e). Schools in this category shall continue to provide the supplemental educational services and the transfer option called for in the second year of sanctions. Additionally, schools must take at least one of following corrective actions: replace school staff relevant to the failure to make AYP; fully implement a new scientifically based researched curriculum including professional development for all relevant staff; significantly decrease the management authority at the school level; appoint an outside expert to advise the school on its progress to making AYP; extend the school year or day; or restructure the internal organizational structure of the school.

If a school fails to make AYP after one year of corrective action, NCLB goes on to define the next phase of sanctions as restructuring. Again, the school must continue to provide the supplemental educational services and the transfer option called for in the second year of sanctions. Schools in the fourth year of sanctions must pick a form of alternative governance. Alternative governance options include reopening the school as a public charter school; replacing all or most of the staff (which may include the principal) who are relevant to the school's failure to obtain AYP; enter into a contract with a private management company with a demonstrated record of effectiveness to operate a public school; turn the operation of the school over to the state educational agency (if permitted under state law and agreed to by the state); or any other major restructuring of the school's governance arrangement that makes fundamental reforms.

Capacity

One area of concern with NCLB is the capacity of the federal government to maintain support. First, federal priorities are subject to legislative appropriations.

Second, a change in federal resources can lead to abandonment or scaling back of projects, and finally, elected officials influence federal priorities. As more and more schools begin to fail to meet NCLB standards, it seems unlikely U.S. congressional representatives will continue to label a rapidly growing contingent of their constituents as failures. Forty-one states had registered some form of complaint concerning the intrusion of NCLB, by August of 2005 (Garcia, Mathis, & Wiley, 2005). Only time will tell if the federal government can keep this expanded role in education a top priority.

The increased federal role in education has led to increased responsibilities for states and local school districts. There is growing evidence that the technical demands imposed by NCLB exceed states' capacities to handle the psychometric problems associated with testing and data analysis (Kim & Sunderman, 2005). Michigan experienced this phenomenon in 2002-03, when failing schools were not identified until January of 2004 (Dunbar & Plank, 2004). The issues surrounding state-level data still exist today. The 2010/11 MEAP data, for assessments administered in early October 2010, were not released until March 31, 2011 (Associated Press, 2011). Additionally, oversight of local implementation of NCLB has been almost nonexistent. Most states, including Michigan, lack financial and human capacity within their departments of education to assist schools adequately once the schools are subjected to sanctions. In many cases it appears that states are struggling to meet most of the demands NCLB placed on them (Sunderman & Orfield, 2007).

Impact on Schools

Proponents of NCLB point out that to "stay in business" schools must implement change and improve (NCREL, 2003). Ideally, sanctions provide the leverage for

meaningful change. Some would claim that these reforms are well deserved since local policy makers and school officials have, for decades, ignored the problems within schools (Mitzell, 2003). Opponents of NCLB quickly point out that the only benefit brought by sanctions has been increased test scores and that these scores have not correlated to overall educational attainment (Carnoy & Loeb, 2002).

Research has indicated that teachers reallocated their time and resources towards tested content (Hamilton, 2011). A notion emerged that this narrowing of curriculum was permissible if the content contained in the assessment was worth teaching (Linn, 2000). In reality, however, while student achievement has increased, the variability between states' proficiency standards makes comparisons difficult. From 2002 until 2009, there were more states that posted gains in student achievement in math and reading, in grades 4, 8, and high school, than states whose achievement scores either remained flat or declined (Kober, Chudowsky, and Chudowsky, 2010). National Assessment of Educational Progress (NEAP) testing confirmed the state gains for most subgroups, from 2005 until 2009, in grades 4 and 8 (Kober, Chudowsky, and Chudowsky, 2010). Despite these positive findings (a basic upward trend) enough differences exist between state and national testing to raise concerns about the narrowing of achievement gaps between student sub-groups, such as African Americans and Hispanics.

Resulting from the lack of cohesiveness between individual states' standards and assessments aimed at determining their effectiveness, current policy has focused on the adoption of a national set of Common Core Standards. The Common Core standards are the result of efforts by the national governor's association and association

of chief state school officers. To date, 42 states have formally adopted the common core (Common Core, 2011). While in theory the common core is a state initiative, U.S. Education Department Secretary Arnie Duncan noted that:

> The release of the common core standards is an important step toward the improvement of quality education nationwide. States have come together to develop standards that are internationally benchmarked and include the knowledge and skills that students must learn to succeed in college and career. (USDOE, 2010, p. 1)

Current assessment-based accountability practices call on high schools to educate all students to higher academic standards prior to graduation. This is somewhat problematic because this is not what high schools were designed to do. Historically, students have not all taken the same coursework, studied the same content, or met the same standards to graduate (Siskin, 2003). As assessment-based accountability systems have continued to evolve, concerns at the high school level over the narrowing of the curriculum, time allocated to test preparation, the practice of pushing at-risk students out of school, and over-certifying students into special education have emerged (Neill, Grisbond, and Schaeffer, 2004).

In general, large urban schools were the first to be impacted by NCLB sanctions. Nationwide, urban schools comprise only 27% of the total number of schools; yet they account for 42% of the total failing schools (Chudowsky & Chudowsky, 2005). In addition, some states with existing assessment programs, such as Michigan, had existing data that "allowed" earlier identification. Michigan had 544 schools fail to make AYP in 2006 compared to 436 in 2005 and 297 in 2004 (MDE, 2006). The state report shows 399 high schools, nearly one-third of all high schools, failed to make AYP. The good news is that 163 schools came out of sanctions, with 55 of those schools having

been in the most advanced phases of sanctions. This advanced identification has been tempered recently. During the 2009-10 school year 86% of all schools made AYP (MDE, 2010c). Eighty-two buildings were removed from NCLB sanctions by making AYP for two consecutive years. There was also an 11% increase in the number of high schools making AYP. While NCLB uses the phrase "scientifically based research" over 100 times, there is no "scientifically based" research to support the use of sanctions as effective means to reform schools (Chudowsky and Chudowsky, 2005). Now that Michigan schools have implemented restructuring options for a few years, some data are emerging. Districts that have implemented four or more strategies over two years are significantly more likely to meet AYP that those that did not. Ninety-six percent of schools implementing four or more strategies over the past two years made AYP, compared to 80% that implemented fewer than four strategies.

No single reform strategy has proven to be most effective (Scott, Kober, Rentner, and Jennings, 2005). In the 2004-05 school year, however, the most popular restructuring option, "implement any other major effort that significantly changes the governance of the school," was used by 93% of the schools. Fifty-eight percent of schools chose to appoint a new principal, while 17% chose to pursue coaching as a means of improvement.

Michigan is experiencing some success with the use of sanctions to remove schools from the list of failing schools. Testing and sanctions, however, are not addressing the underlying problems that cause poor performance (Garcia et al., 2005).

Staff Quality

The requirement in NCLB that all students be taught by "highly qualified" teachers created serious problems for local schools. 'Highly qualified' was defined in the federal legislation to mean that a teacher (1) has earned at a minimum a bachelor's degree; (2) has earned full state certification; and (3) has demonstrated subject area competence in each area they teach (USDOE, 2002). The federal definition of "highly qualified" created troubles for states in that many teachers, particularly veteran teachers, were certified for the grades and courses they taught, but these same teachers did not meet the new federal requirements to teach these classes.

As a result of the new legislation, states were required to determine how teachers could receive "highly qualified" designation, with all teachers required to meet these requirements by June 30, 2006. The simplest and easiest way was to have a major or minor in each subject area taught and pass some type of state assessment to demonstrate competence. Teachers were also able to obtain highly qualified status through state defined initiatives where the states have "significant flexibility"(USDOE, 2004). The use of specific professional development in core content areas and/or the development of a portfolio that contained sufficient information to demonstrate competence in each core content taught are two examples of state-defined highly qualified criteria.

Funding

Funding may be the most polar topic considered when discussing NCLB. Supporters and opponents of the federal legislation both have strong factual ground on which to stand. The real issue concerns whether or not the historically high level of

federal funding is sufficient to cover the added expense to meet requirements in the legislation. Some unintended monetary effects, which undermine the overall objectives of the policies, have already surfaced.

Both former U.S. Secretaries of Education, Margret Spellings and Rod Page, have stated that NCLB is fully funded with federal spending at historic levels (Garcia et al., 2005). Education accounts for 8% of the federal budget, Title I represents 2.6% of total education spending, and NCLB appropriations represent a 0.9% increase in overall education spending. Congress's initial 17% increase in Title I funding allocated for NCLB was followed by a 2.8% increase the following year (Jennings, 2002).

There is considerable discrepancy between the level of funding proposed in NCLB legislation and what was allocated. In 2004, Title I appropriations were increased 5.6% and appropriations for ESEA were increased 5.1% despite the proposed 2.6% reduction called for in the President's budget (Kim & Sunderman, 2005). President Obama has sought increases in federal education expenditures, something president Bush did not do after initial NCLB authorization. Recent increases in federal education spending have come in the form of competitive grants titled Race To The Top (USDOE, 2010a). Few states and schools have been selected for this additional money.

Many groups believe NCLB is grossly underfunded. The National Governors Association, Center for Educational Policy, and the National Conference of State Legislatures all have voiced strong concern over the inadequate funding of NCLB. The National Governors Association released a bipartisan statement declaring NCLB an unfunded mandate and called for greater flexibility in addition to increased funding (Kim & Sunderman, 2005). The Ohio legislature, working with a broad range of educational

experts, concluded that their annual compliance cost would be 1.5 billion dollars (Kim & Sunderman, 2004b). Nationwide estimates show as much as a 12 billion dollar shortfall in NCLB funding (Meier, Kohn, Darling-Hammond, Sizer, & Wood, 2004). *The New York Times* criticized President Bush for failing to seek the full-authorized funding (Mitzell, 2003). As a result of this lack of funding, many states passed legislation preventing districts from spending additional money for compliance (Kim et al., 2005).

Many Michigan schools are in a precarious situation. The aforementioned problem of federal funding is compounded by the worst state economy and resulting state fiscal situation in twenty years (Garcia et al., 2005). Michigan is not alone. Thirty-seven states cut nearly 12.6 billion dollars in 2002, and 14.5 billion in 2003, to balance their budgets. To make matters even worse, the federal government did not allow for revenue sharing as it has typically done to help states through economic downturns. At the 2003 meeting of the National Governors Association, President Bush cited the federal budget deficit and the cost of the war in Iraq as reasons not to provide relief to states.

Michigan Response to NCLB

Education Yes! and Report Cards

The Michigan Department of Education put forth a blueprint for ensuring the success of all schools, with the 2002 adoption of the *Education, Yes!* a school accountability program. This complex system combines new state accountability requirements with the requirements mandated under No Child Left Behind. In accordance with NCLB legislation, Michigan created guidelines explaining the various components used to grade schools on the NCLB mandated school report cards.

Michigan report card grades are comprised of five state components: English/Language Arts achievement; Mathematics achievement; Science achievement; Social Studies achievement; and a series of performance indicators plus AYP status (MDE, 2003). The subject area achievement data are based on assessment data that include three parts: status, change, and, beginning in 2008, growth. A self-assessment of performance on indicators of school improvement, and graduation rate complete the Michigan requirements (MDE, 2003). AYP, the final facet and the federal component, is based on the percentage of students who reach a set performance level on the state-mandated achievement tests.

The self-assessment included in *Education Yes!* focuses on measures of school performance. Measures of school performance include (1) indicators of engagement; (2) indicators of instructional quality; and (3) indicators of learning opportunities (MDE, 2008b). There are 40 standards on which the schools have to rate themselves according to a rubric. The self-assessment comprises 33% of a school's overall report card grade. Clearly, there is an incentive for some schools to rate themselves more highly in an effort to raise their overall report card grades. In 2006-07 the state of Michigan supplied a grading program for the self-assessment. This allowed schools to determine what their grades would be on the self-assessments based on their answers prior to submitting the data. In 2007-08, this dilemma was removed when the Michigan Department of Education assigned each school completing the self-assessment 100%.

Michigan's newest school accountability tool, Mi-SAS, is based on student achievement and compliance with Michigan Statute. Four components will be utilized to determine an Annual State Accreditation Status for each school. The components are:

student achievement, compliance with Michigan statute, annual state accreditation status, and additional school, district, community, and state information (MDE, 2009) The new instrument has been tied up in the court system since 2009, and has been released as of 2011 (MASSP, 2009).

As previously alluded to, Michigan's self-assessment has undergone several changes. The original model had schools completing an assessment including 11 standards without a rubric or any solid knowledge of how a grade would be obtained (MDE, 2003). When Michigan released a framework for school accountability, 40 of the 99 standards were used for school self-assessment. The advantage of this system was that a detailed rubric was provided to help schools accurately determine how they scored; however, there were still no way for schools to determine their overall grades on this component prior to submitting their reports. The following year a grading program was provided with the report so schools could see their grades prior to submitting the data. The self-assessment underwent another change during the 2006-07 school year. While the standards remained largely unchanged, the detailed rubric for determining a school status was greatly reduced; however, every school completing the report received 100% in this area. As of the 2008-09 school year, schools have four options for completing the self-assessment: (1) Schools accredited by the North-Central Association (NCA) annually complete a standards assessment which automatically fulfills the buildings *Education Yes!* reporting requirements; (2) NCA schools that did not complete the NCA assessments are required to complete a new self-assessment; (3) schools not members of NCA still have the opportunity to complete the 40 performance indicators as they did last year; and (4) schools not members of NCA that

participated in a pilot project last year will complete a document fulfilling the requirements of *Education Yes!*

The remaining 67% of a school's report card grade comes from measures of student achievement. The measures of student achievement are divided into three categories: (1) achievement status -– 23%; (2) achievement change -– 22%; and (3) achievement growth -- 22% (MDE, 2003). Achievement status uses up to three years of previous testing data to determine the overall level of achievement within the school building. Achievement change considers the trend line of previous data to determine whether student achievement is increasing at the rate necessary to have 100% of students proficient in the year 2014. Achievement growth is a new program approved by the US Department of Education, beginning 2007-2008. The growth model will measure whether individual students have gained at least one year of educational growth for one year of instruction. Achievement status, change, and growth are used to compute a grade in each of the four core content areas, reading/language arts, math, science and social studies. The resulting scores for each content area are then averaged to determine an overall achievement score for the building.

Once the self-assessment and the achievement data are obtained, an overall score for the building can be determined using the aforementioned criteria. Letter grades are assigned based on the scores and whether or not the school made adequate yearly progress. Table 2.3 shows the scores necessary for schools to obtain each grade.

It should be noted that the federal criteria of 95% students tested and attendance or graduation rates are used to determine adequate yearly status.

Table 2.3

Michigan School Report Card Grade Matrix

Education YES! Composite Score	Did Not Make AYP	Makes AYP
90 – 100	B	A
80 – 89	B	B
70 – 79	C	C
60 – 69	D/Alert	C
50 – 59	Unaccredited	D/Alert

Individual school and district report card grades have taken on particular importance in Michigan as newspapers and school boards of education pay close attention to these grades, now readily available to the public. As the pubic becomes more aware of this accountability system, there is increasing pressure to improve and maintain good report card grades (GenNet Principals, 2007).

Accountability is once again undergoing change in Michigan. The Michigan State Board of Education and the Michigan Department of Education's Office of Education Assessment and Accountability are proposing a new system which would replace *Education Yes!* for the 2009-10 school year (MASSP, 2008). As previously mentioned, the new accountability system Mi-SAS is still being revised and is the subject of litigation which has inhibited its implementation. The double jeopardy of both failing to meet AYP and being unaccredited is central to the reform. Under the new system being proposed:

Schools would be accredited if 60% of students were proficient on all but one of the MEAP/Merit Exam subjects. Two or more subjects below 60% would drop the school to interim accredited and any subject below 35% would drop the school to unaccredited. (MASSP, 2008, p. 2)

School letter grades also would be dropped in favor of a page of statistics explaining the reason why a school did or did not receive accreditation.

Michigan Merit Examination

In 2007, the Michigan Merit Examination (MME) replaced the Michigan Education Assessment Program (MEAP) at the high school level. The MME is comprised of three sections: the ACT plus writing (ACT is one of the standard examinations required by many colleges for admission), parts of the ACT Work Keys (Work Keys is used by many businesses to determine competence for particular areas of employment), and Michigan Content (it assesses all the areas of the state curriculum not tested on either of the other assessments). Beginning with the 2008-09 school year, an additional ACT Work Keys component, locating information, was added in order to provide students the opportunity to obtain a work readiness certificate from ACT.

Michigan had a strong history of allowing students to retest on the state's standardized assessments at the high school level. Under the old high school MEAP test guidelines, students could take the test five times. Originally, students were allowed to take the Michigan Merit Exam twice with students first taking the exam in the spring of their junior year. Seniors could retest one additional time. Beginning with the 2008 - 2009 school year, students' ability to retest was greatly diminished. Only students who did not obtained a qualifying (valid) score on the MME may retest.

Michigan Merit Curriculum

In 2006, the Michigan state legislature passed laws aimed at increasing the 3 R's of high school education - Rigor, Relevance and Relationships. While most high schools had higher graduation requirements, part of the impetus for this change was the minimal requirement (1/2 credit of U.S. Government) required by the state (MDE, 2008b). The goal of the Michigan Merit Curriculum is for *all* students to be ready for college. The curriculum requires, in part, that all high school students complete four years of mathematics including algebra II, four years of English, and three years of science with one course being chemistry or physics (MDE, 2006). The required curriculum also includes three years of social studies, a semester each of health and physical education, two years of world (foreign) languages and a credit in visual/performing arts. Michigan Merit Curriculum now accounts for 16 credits, leaving fewer opportunities for students to explore interests in elective areas.

The Michigan Merit Curriculum legislation contained two radically new provisions. The first provision requires districts to grant credit for students who demonstrate mastery of a course through the "testing out" option. The law states that:

> A school district... shall also grant a student a credit if the student earns a qualifying score... as determined by the local school district... on one or more assessments developed or selected by the school district... that measure a student's understanding of the subject area content expectations or guidelines that apply to credit. (MDE, 2007, p. 2)

For many schools the testing out exam is also the final exam. Therefore, Genesee County high school principals, curriculum directors, and superintendents have agreed that a student who earns a grade of 78% or better on a comprehensive final exam will earn credit in the class regardless of their overall grade.

The second provision the state developed was a "personal curriculum" for students. A personal curriculum allows modifications to the required Michigan Merit Curriculum, and in some circumstances it can still lead to a high school diploma. The intent of a personal curriculum is two-fold: it allows students to trade courses in order to take more math and science classes; it also modifies the algebra II requirement after the student has completed the first half of this class. In exchange for reducing math requirement, additional credits must be earned in other core areas.

History of the Principal's Role in Local Governance

This review concludes with some considerations of the impact of state and federal accountability policies on high school principals. To understand the historic role of the principal, one must first consider the origins of public school in the United States.. Public schools, primarily one-room schools, existed for approximately 150 years before the advent of the school principal. Once the position of principal was established, he was responsible to the local board of education.

Local school boards are an American invention developed with the local systems of education (Faber, 1990). Local boards of education arose through and have jurisdiction over schools through state legislations. School boards persist because supporters argue that elected school boards give all voices the opportunity to be heard, provide transparency for school business, and distribute educational services fairly and equitably throughout the school system (Hess, 2010). However, their effectiveness is routinely debated. Opponents of school boards note that a lack of voter attention makes it difficult for voters to hold board members accountable; electoral apathy allows mobilized constituencies (teacher unions) to expert disproportionate influence; and

shifting membership of elected boards can be blamed for lack of program coherence (Hess).

The use of school districts, as a system, arose from the geographical and the ideological circumstances of early colonial education. Specifically, issues concerning communication and transportation coupled with an aversion to centralized authority necessitated a district system that allowed for local control. For example, colonies were often created with specific outcomes in mind. As a result, schools from different regions held differing priorities (Spring, 2001). Historian Lawrence Cremin (1970) points out that Virginia companies, chartered in the early 1600s, primarily were concerned with the creation of plantations -- for the express purpose of generating profit. As such, education in this area centered on maintaining discipline. Many New England colonies were created for specific religious purposes and schooling, with an emphasis on religious doctrine, was viewed as important to sustain a well-ordered community. Local control and variation in schooling has continued to be a unique characteristic of U.S. schooling. And, historically, U.S. high school principals have been assessed and judged on how well they served local community values and needs.

Principal Role Expectations

The position of school principal evolved over a hundred years ago, when and where one-room school houses began to disappear. From 1880 to 1920 the number of students attending school in the United States increased from 200,000 to 2,000,000. With the increase in student population, schools began to hire multiple teachers and provide more services. The initial concept involved having a principal teacher who fulfilled a variety of roles including teacher, town clerk, grave digger, church chorister,

court messenger, and occasionally church bell ringer (Goldman, 2006). Somewhat interestingly, the concept of principal teacher began at the high school level. Over time the teaching and other duties became too time consuming and the principal's role was limited to managing the school.

Initial expectations for school principals were managerial with limited responsibility for academic programs (Fredericks & Brown, 1993). Over time, the expectations of the principal's role has changed, but, in actuality, the largely managerial aspect of the job has remained the same. This can be seen in the following quote from 1926:

> The principal of a large modern high school…has regarded himself these many years as primarily a supervisor of instruction. But each passing year finds some new activity demanding its share of his time and energies. A new program of secondary education steadily assuming form and substance is pulling him farther and farther from his classrooms, and now and then he asks himself just what are my functions. To come down quickly to a statement of what seems to be the trend of his new tasks, the time is not far distant when he can with entire peace of mind and in all propriety regard himself in what will really be his fixed capacity, the manager of a great social institution. (Courter,NASSP Bulletin, 1926)

The predominate view of principals as managers continued into the 1980s. In the early 1980s, the *A Nation at Risk Report* not only highlighted the failings of American schools but focused on the individual school as the unit of change and underscored research emphasizing the importance of principal leadership to school reform and improvement. Consequently, expectations for principals increased significantly.

In the past 20 years the view of principals' responsibility has continued to evolve. The Goals 2000: Educate America Act shifted the groundwork and assumptions regarding school principals and introduced the notion of instructional leadership as a key principal duty (Portin, Alejano, Knapp, & Marzolf, 2006). Initial views of instructional

leadership include top-down supervision and evaluation of school programs, curriculum, and teachers; instructional supervision included setting goals, examining curriculum, evaluating teachers, and assessing results. Modern views of instructional leadership maintain similar focus but shun the top-down role of leadership in favor of working collaboratively with teachers and stakeholders (Ubben & Hughes, 1997).

While current theory and policy call on school principals to be instructional leaders, boldly leading their schools to new levels of academic attainment, in reality management roles frequently take precedence. A 1998 study of principals as managers and leaders highlighted the fact that while principals strove to fulfill instructional leadership tasks, they were faced with an endless stream of management responsibilities (Cascadden, 1998). The notion of management actually being the top priority over instructional leadership for principals has been confirmed in numerous studies (Chan & Pool, 2002; Cooley & Shen, 2003; Goodwin, Cunningham, & Childress, 2003; Ricciardi & Petrosko, 2001).

Implications of Competing Expectations for Principals

State and Federal legislatures have rewritten the definition of what it means to be an educated person and what it means to be a principal. Under assessment-based accountability brought on by NCLB, an educated person is one who scores high on standardized math and reading tests (Meier, 2004). Relying on standardized test scores as the measure for success usurps local school boards and parents of the ability to define attributes of a sound education. Accountability demands brought on school leaders by NCLB fall into three main areas: (1) assessment and accountability, (2) parental choice, and (3) quality teachers (Petersen & Young, 2004)

Assessment and accountability demands placed on schools by NCLB can have huge consequences for school principals. The section above, which highlights NCLB sanctions, lists 'replacing the principal' as one possible consequence for poor student performance. Assessment-based accountability concerns over narrowing the curriculum were likewise previously examined. Principals face new pressures about how to balance accountability demands with professional values about teaching, learning, and student support. In Michigan, the balancing act between acceptable and unacceptable instructional practices has become murkier. For example, State Superintendent Mike Flanagan sent out a memo in 2009 stating that Michigan's High School Content Expectations were not to be a "check off list." Mr. Flanagan went on to say, "We know that there is no way for schools to cover in depth every High School Content Expectations nor should districts make that attempt" (MASSP, 2009). Instead, Mr. Flanagan called on educators to locally identify the most important expectations and focus their instruction on these areas. For educators, this memo further blurred the line of acceptable practices by appearing to focus instruction on tested content.

The definition of instructional leadership put forth above called on principals to work collaboratively with staff and parents to set goals, examine curriculum, evaluate teachers, and assess results. By setting the definition of success for all students, accountability policy has made public engagement and parental involvement extremely difficult (Meier, 2004). Principals can work with constituent groups in an effort to be authentic "instructional leaders" as long as the groups' priorities align with the state and federal standards.

NCLB has also introduced potential constraints on principals in their ability to place teachers within their building in desired assignments. In some instances teachers who had been successfully teaching particular classes for many years prior to NCLB, did not meet the new Highly Qualified requirements and were no longer able to teach these classes. NCLB set the laudable goal of having a highly qualified teacher in front of every student. Specifics of highly qualified requirements, noted previously, can cause problems for building leaders. Some states have noted the difficulty for small rural and large urban districts to attract highly qualified teachers (Petersen & Young, 2004). Unable to find individuals that meet the highly qualified requirements, these districts frequently have had to settle for individuals capable of obtaining substitute teaching permits to fill the void. Thus, building principals have to face the community pressure associated with the sometimes quirky outcomes of the highly qualified teacher requirements.

Whether utilized or not, school choice programs, created by the transfer option in NCLB, impact principals' ability to lead as they try to balance the desires of parents with the demands of federal and state accountability measures. School leaders are keenly aware of the influence parent and community involvement can bring to a school (Petersen, 1989). Principals' jobs would be more manageable if community and parental desires coincided with the aims of the accountability measures (Portin et al., 2006). Unfortunately some decisions that principals are required to make in order to meet NCLB requirements may be in direct conflict with parental and local community desires. While NCLB created a transfer option so parents unhappy with their schools could have their children attend another school or district, for a variety of reasons few

parents are willing to use this option. Thus the conflict continues (Petersen & Young, 2004).

For the vast history of America's schools, principals have been almost exclusively responsible to local school boards of education. Current school accountability policy has shifted the focus of who principals are accountable to. NCLB has brought on a matrix of overseers that school principals are held responsible to, including boards of education, parents, and state and federal laws. As a result, principals are now being torn between meeting the demands of local constituents and those of state/federal accountability policies.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Restatement of Purpose

The purpose of this study was to investigate how building level principals in Genesee County, Michigan, responded to federal (NCLB) and state (Michigan's Education, Yes!) accountability systems. The study focused on identifying and broadly categorizing the leading concerns and actions taken by high school principals in response to these multiple pressures. The study aimed to develop an empirical picture of what was transpiring in a broad sample of schools, to provide an analysis of how leaders prioritized policy pressures, and to share how they managed conflicts between the decisions they made and their personal and professional beliefs about what was best for the students in their care.

Study Design

This study used a qualitative case study design. A qualitative approach was selected as the research focused "on discovery, insight, and understanding from the perspective of those being studied" (Merrian, 1998, p. 1). Furthermore, the study examined events in context as they unfolded in a specified sample of high schools.

Merrian (1998) describes case studies as a means to "…gain an in-depth understanding of the situation and meaning for those involved. The interest is in process rather than outcomes, in context rather than a specific variable, in discovery rather than confirmation" (p. 19). In this instance, the study aimed to reveal not only what concerns and strategies dominated high school principals' responses to NCLB and Michigan's

school accountability system, but also to bring to the surface important themes in the thought and decision processes used.

The use of a case study approach calls for thoughtful attention to two fundamental issues: the unit of analysis and focus on a small number of concerns (Tellis, 1997). This study selected high school principals as its unit for two primary reasons. First, principals have a key role in implementing policy. Secondly, research has suggested that recent school accountability measures have indeed, changed the orientations and behavior of principals (Goertz & Duffy, 2003). The focal issue selected was the decision making of high school principals responding to accountability policies and their reflections on these decisions.

Participants

Potential participants in this study were limited to the 24 principals of public high school in Genesee County. Private, charter, and alternative high schools were excluded from consideration because their missions and policy contexts differed from those of the public schools in significant ways. Of the 24 potential high schools, 1 was excluded as it was the workplace of the researcher. Four principals new to school administration or the district were excluded since they would not be able to respond to questions about decisions made over the past year. One principal was called to military duty in the midst of the study. Lastly, 5 principals declined to participate in the study. This left a final sample of 13 high school principals.

By Michigan report card standards, the sample of participating and non-participating schools did not differ dramatically, as evidenced in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1

Analysis of Participating and Nonparticipating Schools by AYP Status

Michigan School Report Card Grade	Non-Participating Schools		Participating Schools	
	Making AYP	Not Making AYP	Making AYP	Not Making AYP
A	9%		15%	
B	27%		31%	8%
C	9%	18%	23%	15%
D		36%		8%

Note: the data in this and all subsequent tables and figures come from research conducted by the author from 2009-2010.

But, some notable differences did exist. While 69% of the participating schools had made AYP, only 45% of the non-participating school had. It should be pointed out that fewer urban schools participated in the study. While the final sample provides a picture of a broad cross-section of high school principal activity in a single country, it may not give fair representation to low-performing urban high schools or high school leaders.

School Level Profiles for Genesee County

County enrollment trends, school district enrollment trends, building ethnic demographics, district census information and Michigan School Report Card grades provide a descriptive overview of the schools in this study.

Enrollment Trends

While overall student enrollment has been declining, enrollment has been relatively flat from 1996 until 2006 (GISD, 2009b). Beginning in 2006 and extending into

the foreseeable future, many Genesee County schools will have to cope with declining student enrollment and corresponding funding decreases. Table 3.2 shows the current enrollment in the participating school districts. Here we see that enrollment trends vary considerably from district to district in the County, with some districts gaining and others losing students. It should also be noted that, with the exception of one district, Flint

Table 3.2

Recent Enrollment Trends for Genesee County School Districts Included in This Study

District	1998-99	2002-03	2007-08	Change from 1998 to 2008
A	5,443.90	5,259.86	5,174.01	-269.89
B	5,108.88	5,299.70	5,477.95	369.07
C	25,436.07	21,270.65	15,728.79	-9,707.28
D	4,275.68	4,342.91	4,477.69	202.01
E	997.00	1,010.45	845.00	-152.00
F	5,890.76	6,789.00	8,474.56	2,583.80
G	3,888.02	3,901.85	3,717.35	-170.67
H	2,305.21	2,128.69	1,825.57	-479.64
I	2,754.70	2,926.84	3,081.46	326.76
J	1,595.50	1,689.00	1,659.85	64.35
K	3,138.30	3,349.68	3,348.48	210.18
L	4,246.38	4,138.03	4,228.98	-17.40
Total	65,080.40	62,106.66	58,039.69	-7,040.71

Community Schools with two high schools in the sample, all other districts in the sample have only one high school.

In Michigan, school funding is directly tied to student enrollment. Declining enrollment equals decreasing revenue. Principals in districts with declining enrollments may lack the fiscal resources to make desired changes. For example, structural changes (movement from semester to trimester), curricular changes (additional support classes), and instructional changes (with requisite professional development) generally require additional resources. Principals in financially strapped school districts may simply not be able to afford some of the changes they would like to see in their schools. The inability to make desired changes compounds the frustration when schools fail to meet AYP requirements.

Financial Health

Michigan changed its school funding methods in 1994 to move away from a system based on property tax to one based predominately on sales tax (Weiss, 2008). The new system was based on establishing a per pupil amount for districts. This system worked well, as long as Michigan's economy was strong. Michigan, like most states, experienced a dramatic downturn in its economy beginning with the 2001 recession and the following decline in manufacturing (Singh & Isely, 2009). As student populations declined, so did schools funding.

For building principals, the uncertainty in funding created a situation where they were forced to work with unknown future resources. Forty-three districts in Michigan ended the 2010 school year with a deficit, up from 18 school districts in 2005 (MDE, 2011). The 21 school districts, in Genesee County, as a whole have had a 25 million

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dollar reduction in their school fund balances in the past 5 years (Thorne, 2011). While

no study has explored the direct building-level impact of these recent sustained

decreases in funds, it likely has had an impact on decisions that building principals

make.

Demographic Information

Genesee County school districts encompass a diverse range of communities.

There are districts comprised predominately of minority students and districts with

student populations that are almost 100% Caucasian. Information on the race/ethnic

composition of the participating districts is contained in Table 3.3.

Genesee Country also has a mix of districts classified as urban, suburban, and

rural. Across the County, high school poverty levels range from a low of 4% to a high of

62% (MDE, 2007). Table 3.4 provides data not only on the percentage of students who

qualify for free and reduced meals, but also on other indicators of poverty such as

median price of house, median household income, percentage of enrolled students

living in poverty, percentage of students living with only their mother, and percentage of

mothers with a college education.

Demonstrated Student Achievement

Genesee County high schools are diverse. The largest local education agency

(LEA) in the county has approximately 17,000 students (the third largest district in

Michigan and the 263rd largest district in the entire country, according to the National

Center for Educational Statistics, 2000). The smallest high school in the county is

located in a district that has a total school population of less than 800 students. The

Table 3.3

Student Demographic Information by High School

High School (same district HS combined)	Black or African American	American Indian or Alaska Native	Asian	Hispanic or Latino	White	Multiracial
A	33.2%	6.0%	2.5%	2.0%	55.9%	0.4%
B	1.7%	3.2%	1.2%	1.6%	92.1%	0.1%
C	75.0%	0.5%	0.9%	3.1%	20.1%	0.1%
D	2.7%	0.5%	0.6%	0.9%	92.6%	2.8%
E	4.4%	0.4%	0.4%	5.4%	89.4%	0.0%
F	4.2%	0.0%	0.9%	0.8%	81.6%	12.5%
G	3.7%	0.1%	0.6%	2.4%	93.2%	0.0%
H	1.3%	0.5%	0.9%	1.3%	96.1%	0.0%
I	0.1%	0.0%	0.4%	0.6%	98.8%	0.0%
J	2.5%	2.1%	1.1%	4.0%	90.3%	0.0%
K	10.7%	10.6%	0.3%	2.7%	75.5%	0.0%
L	2.3%	2.7%	1.1%	2.1%	91.8%	0.0%

second largest district in the county consistently scores among the top 5% of all schools in Michigan on state assessments, while other districts have schools that score in the bottom 5% of all schools in the state. Table 3.5 contains the Michigan Report Card Grades and the AYP status of participating school districts in Genesee County for three academic years.

Table 3.4

Genesee ISD 2007 Free and Reduced Lunch & School District 2000 Census Data

District	% Students Receiving Free and Reduced Meals	Median Price of House	Median Household Income	% Students Living in Poverty	% Living with Mother Only	% Mothers with College Ed.
A	55%	97,300	39,249	12%	33%	27%
B	25%	118,200	44,703	7%	19%	29%
C	69%	49,700	28,018	33%	57%	17%
D	22%	127,500	55,727	5%	14%	39%
E	50%	101,300	36,784	13%	23%	7%
F	20%	137,100	58,019	4%	18%	47%
G	31%	100,300	50.856	9%	21%	26%
H	36%	109,700	50,410	5%	12%	23%
I	19%	160,300	61,969	2%	11%	41%
J	48%	93,000	50,152	9%	20%	21%
K	64%	77,300	36,938	14%	28%	10%
L	25%	117,400	50,865	5%	18%	31%

Data Collection and Methodology

The primary method of data collection was a semi-structured interview addressing five themes: (1) participant's professional profile, (2) participant's most pressing performance and accountability concerns, (3) participant's responses to these concerns, (4) participant's experiences of policy clutter and conflict, and (5) participant's

Table 3.5

Report Card Grades and AYP Status of Genesee County High Schools

| High School | Report Card Grade and AYP Status | | | | | |
	2008		2009		2010	
A	C	No	C	No	C	No
B	A	Yes	B	No	B	Yes
C	D	No	D	No	D	No
D	B	Yes	A	Yes	A	Yes
E	C	Yes	C	Yes	C	Yes
F	A	Yes	B	No	A	Yes
G	B	Yes	B	Yes	B	Yes
H	B	Yes	B	Yes	B	Yes
I	B	No	A	Yes	A	Yes
J	C	Yes	C	No	C	Yes
K	C	No	C	No	C	Yes
L	B	Yes	B	Yes	B	Yes
M	C	Yes	C	Yes	B	Yes

overall reflections. The initial questions had some general, ice-breaker qualities. As the interview progressed, questions asked for greater levels of specificity and reflection.

The interviews were conducted according to the interview protocol accepted by the Institutional Review Board at Michigan State University. Interviewees signed consent forms acknowledging participation in the study with the assurance that their responses would be kept confidential. While district demographic data may make it

possible to deductively identify some participating districts (and thus principals) , the specific comments and reflections shared have been grouped or treated in ways to prevent connections to be made between comments and individuals. This protection was explained to each participant prior to the interview.

The interview questions were piloted with two high school principals outside of Genesee County. The first participant was a first-year high school principal and closely represented the least experienced principal in the sample. The second participant was a principal with 30 years in administration and provided an opportunity to examine how a veteran administrator would respond to the questions. The two principals also represented schools of differing sizes, one principal from a Class A school (more than 1,000 students), the other from a Class B school (between 500-1,000 students).

Knowing the value of principals' time and the general inconvenience of being interviewed, one concern addressed by the pilot research was the length of time the interviews would take. The interviews were completed in 56 minutes and 73 minutes respectively.

In all, the pilot provided evidence that participants understood the interview questions and that the questions elicited relevant responses and information on the five key themes. However, based on the difficulties the first- year principal had answering questions based in a larger time frame, the study decided to exclude first-year principals

A similar interview procedure was used to gather data. Participants were given the interview protocol prior to the interview. Study interviews were audio recorded in media wave format for best clarity. During the interview, the researcher could visually verify that audio was being captured. Interviews generally lasted one hour. During this

time, the interviewer was cognizant of and reflexive to the five activities of interviewing put forth by Dilley (2000): (1) listen to what the person is saying; (2) compare what the person says to what we know; (3) compare what the person says to questions on the rest of the protocol; (4) be cognizant of when to stray from the protocol and when stick to it; and (5) offer information to prompt reflection, clarification, or further explication as needed. Interviews were transcribed as they were completed, using Nuance's Dragon Naturally Speaking 10 software.

Data Analysis

Data analysis of transcripts and interview notes began with the pilot interviews and were guided by Yin's model of "examining, categorizing, tabulating, and/or recombining evidence to address the initial purpose of the study" (Yin, 1994). A key task was developing a coding system for categorizing and analyzing the concern and action areas principals discussed during the interview. Principals reported how their concerns connected to particular accountability policies, and this is reported as indicated by them in interviews . Following this, however, analysis required some scheme that could credibly categorize (1) the issue area of a principal's concerns (for example, a concern for curriculum, staffing, support systems for students, etc.), and (2) the type of actions taken (creating new rules or policies, for example). Several coding schemes were piloted to find a credible system. A challenge was reaching a scheme that managed complex actions. For example, a decision to invest in professional development on differentiated instruction could feasibly be categorized as teacher development or curriculum development or an act of school leadership and management. To manage this, the researcher reached a set of broad but distinct categories that successfully

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captured but separated the large range of concerns and actions reported by principals. The 6 categories were:

1. <u>Course and Curriculum Change</u>: Actions made at the school (versus teacher) level about courses offerings. Include course additions or deletions, changes to course requirements, credit load, sequences or structure.

2. <u>Developing Teachers</u>: Actions aimed to develop teacher knowledge, skills and capabilities. Commonly professional development, teacher learning initiatives on core practice issues such as subject matter knowledge, instructional strategies, assessment and/or data use practices.

3. <u>Instructional Targeting, Development & Assessment</u>: Actions directed to or taken by teacher groups to improve classroom instruction and assessment. Common examples were targeting and re-teaching of particular knowledge and skills areas, using new instructional materials, developing new assessment routines, using new grouping structures with students.

4. <u>Interventions</u>: Special or add-on programs aimed at particular issues or groups of students. Common examples were new before or after-school programs, special double-loop learning opportunities, credit-recovery programs and/or new behavior incentive or sanction programs or policies.

5. <u>Organizational Structure and Management</u>: Executive actions taken to change structure and policy at the school level. Examples were changes to scheduling, changes in staffing arrangements, new supervision routines (i.e. requiring lesson plans or other reports), or new attendance policies and procedures.

6. <u>Leadership</u>: Used to capture actions by principals to educate and motivate staff, for example helping to frame policy implications or communicate the meaning and intentions of decisions.

Examples of the coding schemes are shown in Table 3.6.

Once a coding scheme was developed, Atlas TI software was used to support data analyses.

Validity

Data collection for this study involved a single method: audio recorded and transcribed, semi-structured, individual interviews with the 13 participants. The method supported descriptive validity by capturing the actual words, phrases and even tonality of participants.

Interviews by their very nature create specialized issues concerning internal validity:

> The interview is a social situation and inherently involves a relationship between the interviewer and the informant. Understanding the nature of that situation and relationship, how it affects what goes on in the interview, and how the informant's actions and views could differ in other situations is crucial to the validity of accounts based on interviews. (Maxwell, 1992, p. 295, citing Briggs, 1986 and Mishler, 1986)

Internal validity concerns arose in this study because the researcher was the principal of a Genesee county high school at the time of the study. He had had a professional relationship with many of the participants for the past four years, meeting at professional meetings and other venues, often discussing the accountability policies investigated in this study. In one respect, this insider status seemed to function as an asset. The willingness of very busy administrators to spend an hour reflecting on their work

Table 3.6

Examples of Coding Scheme

Coding Category	AYP
Course and Curriculum Change	*My first year, the first thing that we did in response to AYP is we got rid of all of our remedial classes.*
Developing Teachers	*…making sure that staff members are aware of core content expectations.*
Instructional Targeting, Development, & Assessment	*…a test prep class for students performing below a certain level on the PLAN test. We have 200 kids who are signed up for it.*
Interventions	*Once a student fails instead of taking second semester you retake first semester [of the course] second semester.*
Leadership	*…trying to build some efficacy for what we do do (sic) because we know you're just not going to turn around a 15 point deficit in subgroups over night.*
Organizational Structure and Management	*Changing to a trimester schedule.*

suggested that personal knowledge of the researcher facilitated the research and

perhaps indicated some level of trust in the integrity of the study. But concerns that the

interviewed principals would respond to questions with socially and professionally

correct or expected answers rather than in a spirit of reflective candor would also be

standard here. To minimize such dynamics, however, the researcher strived to achieve

a good balance of formality and more personal approach in the interview: adhering

closely to the interview protocols, not interjecting personal opinions and comments, but

asking clarifying questions upon hearing replies that seemed different from those heard

earlier in the interview or in other settings. Deep reading of the interview data reveals candid expressions of struggle and frustration and a wide-ranging mix of positive and negative opinions and assessments. So called "textbook" responses were not much in evidence.

The process of coding the transcriptions closely aligned with the research questions. When responding to a particular query, respondents sometimes strayed from one concern into another. At times, new concerns aligned to other questions in the interview protocol, and were coded accordingly. Comments that did not correspond in any manner to any of the questions (for example, an aside about a particular student, teacher or event) were left out of the analysis.

The inductive process used to code and categorize the interview data raises issues of interpretive validity. The study did not involve multiple researchers who might test the correlations of their coding, for example. Thus, the best response in the face of these validity threats is to provide as much raw data to readers so that they have ongoing opportunities to see and judge the consistency and usefulness of the coding decisions and interpretations made. Here again, the researcher sought to limit interpretive mis-steps by using the words and phrases of the interviewees as often as possible and by checking findings against the evidence of the interview data (Maxwell, 1990). The presentation of data in Chapter 4 is fairly extensive, allowing the reader to assess how well findings and interpretations reflect the data.

In general, qualitative studies are not designed to allow generalizations to a wider population (Becker, 1990). The purpose of this study is to provide an empirically based picture of what is actually transpiring among a set of schools. While this sample is not

representative in a statistical sense, it does provide a view of the concerns, actions, and

strategies generated by new accountability policies. Data from this study could be used

to produce grounded hypotheses or propositions for more systemic investigation in

multiple contexts. This study also fills in the gap between studies focusing on large state

level high school data sets and specific case studies of individual high schools.

CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS

Introduction: Reviewing the Interviews

The interview protocol began by asking school leaders, "Among all the state and federal performance demands and accountability measures you now confront, what issue concerns you the most". It went on to ask school leaders to identify their top three or four concerns after this.

An analysis of the data resulted in the emergence of three major sources of concern: one at the federal level, Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), and two state level concerns, the Michigan Merit Curriculum (MMC), and the Michigan Merit Examination (MME). These three concerns are responsible for 174 of the 284 (61%) actions discussed by the principals.

Four concerns clustered into mid-level concerns: (1) policies regarding highly qualified teachers and paraprofessionals, (2) graduation rates, (3) school improvement, and (4) Education, Yes! Less frequent or pressing concerns included issues such as Michigan's personal curriculum, funding, assessment, and overall teacher quality.

Table 4.1 shows concerns identified by school leaders. The concerns listed horizontally correspond to the numbered interview. For instance: during the eighth interview the school leader listed AYP as his/her primary concern and then went on to identify MME and Highly Qualified as his/her other concerns. The vertical column, titled Primary concern, highlights all participants' top area of concern. The final four columns show all other areas of concerns in the order identified by each participant. Since the

Table 4.1

Matrix of School Leader Concerns

Interview #	Primary Concern	Additional Concern	Additional Concern	Additional Concern	Additional Concern
1	AYP	State's interpretation of NCLB's standards	Performance indicators (Ed Yes!)	Highly qualified	School improvement
2	Personal curriculum	Graduation rates	AYP	MMC	School improvement
3	Decrease in student achieve-ment (AYP)	AYP	Staff's understanding of what all this means and how to apply it	Standardized testing	Finances
4	AYP math	AYP ELA	MMC	Personal curriculum	Graduation rates
5	MMC	MME	Ed Yes!	Highly qualified	
6	AYP	MMC	Highly qualified	Rating schools (Ed Yes!)	
7	AYP	Graduation rates	Staffing	Providing a safe and orderly environment	Budget cuts
8	AYP	MME	Highly qualified		
9	ACT	MME	MMC	Assessment	Increasing student achievement (MME)
10	AYP	Ed Yes!	MMC	Attendance and proficiency	
11	MMC	AYP	Curriculum alignment	Subgroups	
12	MME	AYP	MMC	School improvement	Highly qualified
13	Graduation rates	Test scores (AYP)	Teacher apathy		

principals were not asked to rank these other concerns, one should not make assumptions based on order.

Once the data from the individual interview were analyzed, it was possible to begin aggregating the data. Figure 4.1 provides a frequency count of interviewees' identified areas of concerns. (The "single issue" bar is used to collect some uncommon, school-specific concerns, such as staff's understanding of what all this means and how to apply it, providing a safe and orderly environment, or teacher apathy.)

Top Concern: AYP

Throughout this study, Adequate Yearly Progress quickly emerged as the main concern of Genesee County high school principals. Since this is the cornerstone of both NCLB's and Michigan's Education, Yes! accountability systems, this was not particularly surprising. Eleven out of the thirteen principals interviewed for this study listed AYP as a leading concern, with six of the thirteen principals (46%) listing AYP as their top concern. One principal succinctly stated, "Concern number one, for me, is AYP. Standardized assessment scores - it's all about test scores." Another principal explained why AYP comprised more than one concern for him:

> Here at this school the biggest concern would be AYP as far as math. Originally, when I read through some of this stuff, I was just going to put AYP. Then I wanted to break it down into math and English. The biggest one right now is math. And a lot of the other concerns are going to feed into that, but that is the biggest one. With the bar being raised last year, we were right at the cut score. The year prior, somehow we brought our scores up 11%. I don't know if they adjusted the test or if we had a really good group of kids coming through, but it's looking bleak for this year.

When principals were asked to list their top 3-5 concerns, AYP comprised 22% of the total (58) concerns listed by Genesee County principals. Only two interviewees did
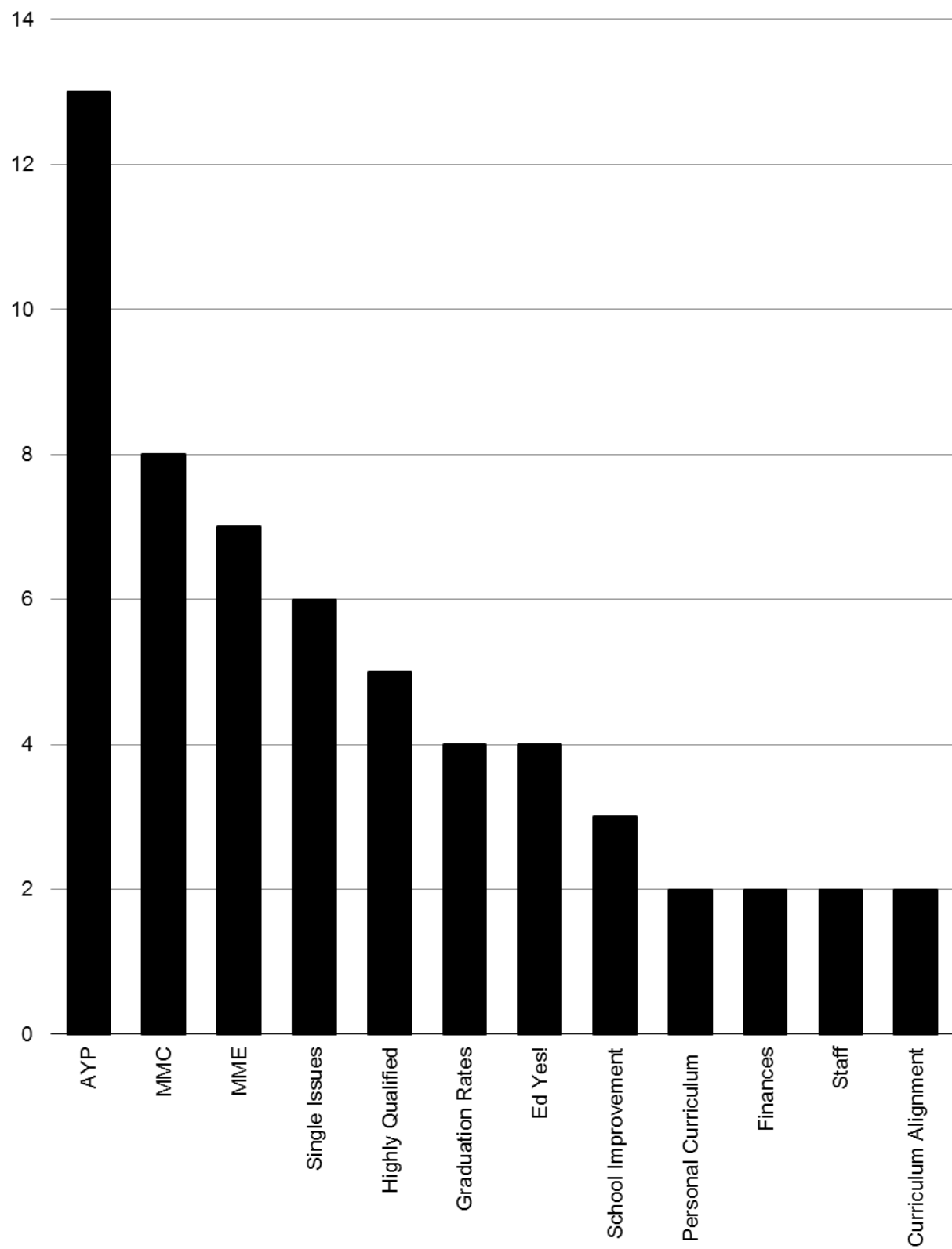
Figure 4.1: Frequency of identified concerns.

not choose AYP as a concern, and these individuals are both principals at schools that made adequate yearly progress and obtained Michigan school report card grades of a B and C.

The 11 principals whose lead concern was meeting the requirements of AYP mentioned 65 actions taken in an effort to ensure that their schools made AYP. These 65 actions are coded into six categories; Course and Curriculum Change; Developing Teachers; Instructional Targeting, Development and Assessment; Interventions; Leadership; and Organizational Structure and Management. The breakdown of all 65 actions into these categories can be seen in Figure 4.2.

From examining Figure 4.2, it is clear the most of the principals' actions are encompassed in the first three categories, Instructional Targeting, Development, and Assessment; Course and Curriculum Changes; and Organizational Structure and Management.

Instructional Targeting, Development, and Assessment

Actions concerning "Instructional Targeting, Development, and Assessment" comprised 32% of the overall actions taken in response to AYP. Table 4.2 further categorizes these actions.

Of these 21 actions taken by the participating principals, over half (57%) of the actions centered on test preparation. Most of the actions encompassed using released MME or ACT test items within the curriculum, focusing on specific skills that were identified as weak by disaggregating test data, or general comments about engaging in test preparation. Two interviewees provided more detail that highlighted Instructional Targeting, Development, and Assessment actions:
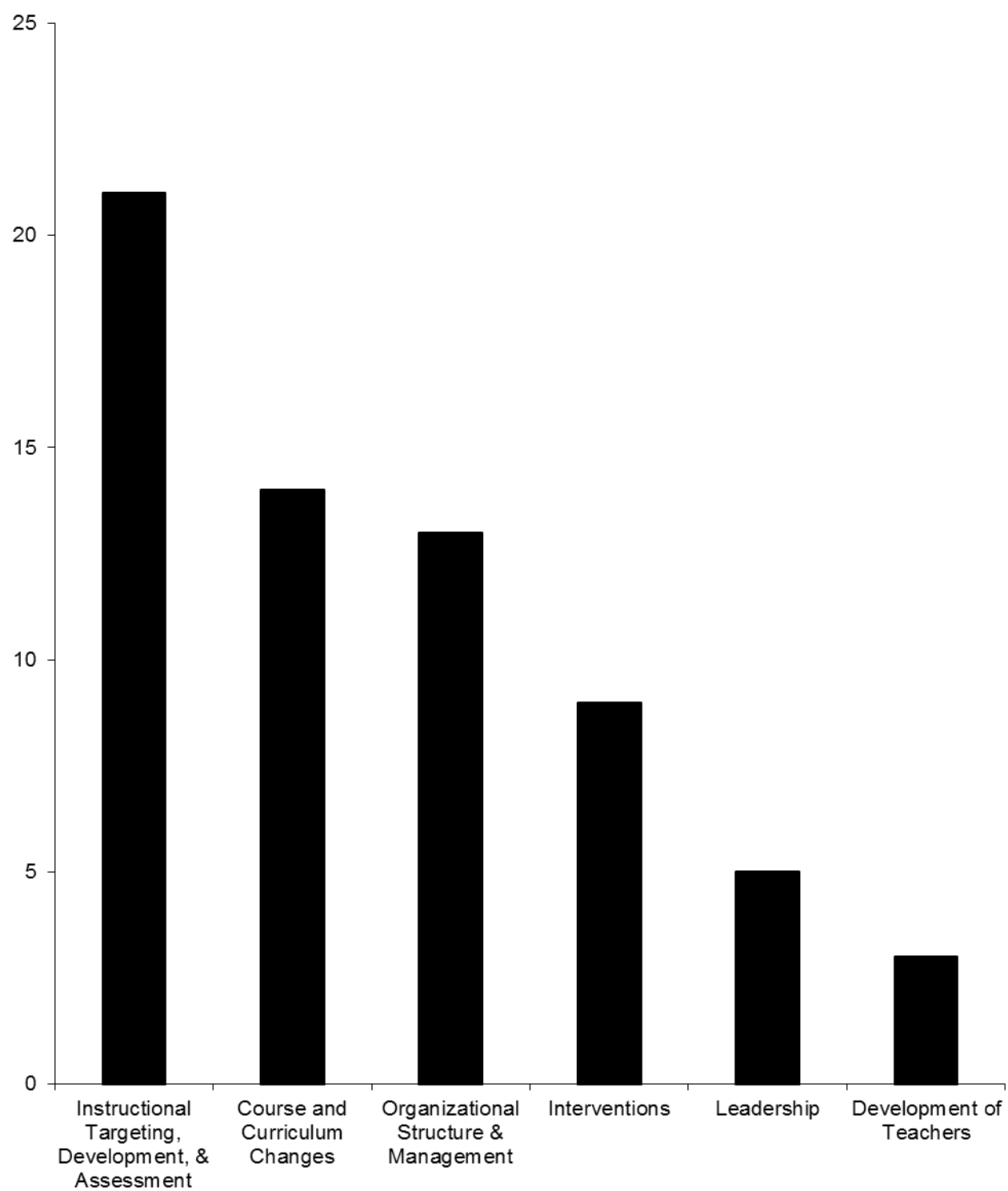
Figure 4.2: Frequency of AYP actions taken.

Table 4.2

Instructional Actions in Response to AYP Concerns

Description of Action	Number of Instructional targeting, development and assessment actions taken in response to concerns with AYP actions	Number of participants that took these actions
Test Preparation	12	8
Curriculum Alignment and Instruction	5	5
Disaggregating Data and End of Course Exams	4	1

> We've developed [a] very intense ACT preparation program. We actually have a graduation requirement; students are enrolled in [specific course name withheld] where a great deal of the time in that class is spent with online ACT prep. Every junior will take that course during the second trimester, right prior to testing…I mean they just hammer the ACT.

This Principal discussed his actions to raise standardized test scores in English

Language Arts:

> Test prep, do we do it? Absolutely. Besides what's imbedded in the curriculum, we spent a lot of time and writing [test prep]in our junior level English classes. This semester, they will write five persuasive writing pieces before they ever get to the MME. Is it overkill? Yes. Do my writing scores need to come up? Absolutely. I told my English teachers, if we don't come up by 10% I am going to be disappointed. We have seen improvement in there. We are so focused on one style of writing just because that is the style that is expected on the test.

Issues of curriculum alignment and instruction accounted for five additional

actions. Two interviewees informed me that they really focused on differentiating

classroom instruction, in order to teach all students. Two principals discussed focusing

on their schools' writing instruction. This differs from the aforementioned test

preparation actions centered on writing, since no link was made to the MME, ACT, or test preparation. The final action from this category was to articulate the scope and sequence of course content with staff in order to develop pacing guides.

The remaining four actions in the category of Instructional Targeting, Developing, and Assessment concerned disaggregating data and end of course assessments. The skill of disaggregating data was taught to teachers in an effort to enable teachers to ascertain student strengths and weaknesses. The weaknesses, once identified, were used as the focal points around which new local assessments were developed. End of course assessments (required by MMC to allow any student obtaining a score of 78% or higher to earn credit for the course) was an area on which some school leaders focused to ensure that the exam aligned with the desired outcomes on the MME, which ultimately determine whether or not a school makes AYP.

Course and Curriculum Changes

Course and Curriculum Change actions accounted for 22% of actions taken in response to concerns with AYP. Half of the fourteen actions in this category involved course creation or course deletion at three high schools in Genesee County (Table 4.3).

Of the four principals who mentioned course creation, two added Advanced Placement Courses (AP), one school added a freshmen transition course, and the final school had an Algebra II/Trigonometry course that was split into two distinct course offerings. The three occurrences of course deletion, as a response to concerns with AYP, all involved the elimination of introductory or remedial courses. One principal stated:

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Table 4.3

Course and Curriculum Change Actions for AYP

Description of Action	Number of Occurrences	Number of participants that took these actions
Course Creation	4	2
Course Elimination	3	2
Examining Curriculum	5	4
Course Sequences	2	2

> My first year, the first thing that we did in response to AYP is we got rid of all of our remedial classes. Whether it was subconscious or not, you noticed that most of our students that were in subgroups of concern happened to be in remedial courses. It didn't take a rocket scientist to figure out that they weren't going to get what they needed before they were juniors, in order to have any chance of passing anything.

Actions that involved examining the curriculum comprised 36% of the actions in this category. Special Education courses were an area of particular concern, as historically, these classes did not necessarily use high school benchmarks when constructing curriculum. As part of AYP, special education subgroups are required to make AYP at the same level as the general school population. Three of these actions identified by the principals involve "raising the bar" for special education students by imparting the High School Content Expectations to students receiving special education services. For example, in many high schools in Genesee County, special education math resource room classes did not cover the same curriculum (Algebra I, Geometry, and Algebra II) as general education math classes. The other two actions included schools examining their overall curriculum to make it more robust. The remaining two (14%) Course and

Curriculum Change actions focused on the sequences of various courses, from something as simple as teaching U.S. History before economics instead of after it, to eliminating a course such as pre-algebra and starting all ninth grade students in Algebra I regardless of prior performance.

Organizational Structure and Management

The third largest category (20%) of actions taken in response to concerns with AYP involved actions that were categorized as "Organizational Structure and Management."

Actions involving test taking analyses (5) and testing conditions (4) account for 69% of the 13 actions in this category (Table 4.4). Test taking analysis actions included two distinct types of actions. The actions focused on analyzing the testing roster to determine which students scores would not count toward AYP based on factors such as mobility and transfer status.

Table 4.4

Organizational Structure and Management Actions for AYP

Description of Action	Number of Occurrences	Number of participants that took these actions
Test Taking Analyses	5	4
Testing Conditions	4	4
Changing to Trimesters	2	2
Highly Qualified	1	1
Nothing	1	1

The two other test taking analysis actions involved item analyses to determine students and specific areas of weakness to produce more/new forms of student performance data to teachers to provide targeted instruction in an effort to enhance learning in time to correct prior to MME testing. The four testing condition actions varied greatly. One principal focused on testing conditions:

> We don't bring in any of the other kids the day of the exam…feeding them breakfast, make sure they're hydrated. I mean all those things that provide a nice testing environment: make sure the building temperature is good; make sure that it's very quiet here, whether we turn the bells off; that they have a little break so they know they're going to get 10 minutes for the bathroom or twenty minutes to have a snack and things like that.

Another principal spoke of actions he took prior to testing to help influence the testing environment.

> We tried to place more importance on the MEAP or the MME, depending on what year, by giving an exemption from final exams to students who completed all sections of the test. That worked for a couple years. It got students' attention; they really tried to get those exam exemptions. We did the pizza parties just to raise the level of awareness. I don't think it was very high when I first got here.

The two scheduling actions involved schools making major changes by moving from a semester approach to a trimester format. The remaining two actions were ensuring highly qualified staff and making no changes.

Interventions

"Interventions" account for 9 of the 65 (14%) actions taken by principals in response to concerns with Adequate Yearly Progress. A breakdown of intervention actions taken in response to concerns with AYP is presented in Table 4.5.

Of these nine actions, four involved new and/or additional targeted support for students within the school day. Two kinds of targeted intervention emerged. The first

Table 4.5

Intervention Actions for AYP

Description of Action	Number of Occurrences	Number of participants that took these actions
Target support inside school day	4	2
Credit recovery	2	1
After school tutoring	1	1
Interactions with principal	1	1
Cooperative summer program with university	1	1

involved students taking an additional support class concurrently with the required core

class. One principal explained:

> We've started identifying at least one group of kids, that we knew were going to
> struggle coming into their freshman year, and we basically do [an] "Algeblock",
> where we give them an algebra support class backup with the same teacher they
> take their algebra one class with. They have their five-minute break, come back
> and do a math support. The premise of the first semester is they work on skills.
> Second semester they continue working with skills that they start getting more
> time to work with the teacher, so it's almost like having a two hour block of
> algebra for those kids.

The other intervention involves decreasing the time students have to wait to retake a

failed class.

> What we've done, we've basically followed the trimester principle, where once a
> student fails, instead of taking second semester [of the course] you retake first
> semester [during the] second semester.

Credit recovery accounted for two additional actions, though no specific program or

strategy was shared. The remaining three actions encompassed after school tutoring,

short-term interactions with the building principal, and cooperative summer school programs with universities.

Leadership

All but one of the five Leadership actions involved increasing the staff's knowledge of Michigan's High School Content Expectations and/or the MME, Michigan's testing system. The other Leadership action taken by a participating principal in response to concerns with AYP, involved sharing with his/her school board his/her opinion on the feasibility of all schools in the nation reaching NCLB's goal of 100% proficiency.

AYP's Impact on School Leaders' Actions

Since all but two building leaders chose Adequate Yearly Progress as a concern, an obvious inquiry arose as to whether or not insights could be obtained by examining the number of actions taken by individual principals. Table 4.6 identifies the actions taken by each school leader, the school's report card grade, and whether or not the school made AYP. It is important to remember that the primary factor in determining state report card grades is the same, high-stakes test used to calculate AYP.

For the most part, it appears that high AYP concerns are leading schools to take multiple actions, whereas schools with fewer AYP concerns or pressures are engaging a much smaller set of actions.

Additional Major Concerns: MMC and MME

The Michigan Merit Curriculum and Michigan Merit Exam were first examined separately. It became obvious that when school leaders discussed these two topics they

Table 4.6

Comparison of Actions, Michigan School Report Card Grade, and AYP Status

Number of Actions	MI School Report Card Grade	Made AYP
13	B	N
9	C	N
4	C	N
9	C	Y
8	B	Y
7	C	Y
5	B	Y
4	B	Y
2	A	Y
2	A	Y

Note: One school needed to be excluded from this table for reasons of deductive disclosure

changed back and forth, using the two almost interchangeably. This makes sense, since the curriculum set forth by the state (MMC) is the basis for the test (MME). As Figure 4.3, demonstrates, the combined concerns with MME and MMC are greater than AYP.

The Michigan Merit Curriculum was the second highest rated area of concern, with two of the thirteen Genesee County high school principals interviewed selecting this as their top priority. The MMC appeared eight times on the list of 58 concerns. One principal explains his thoughts on the MMC:
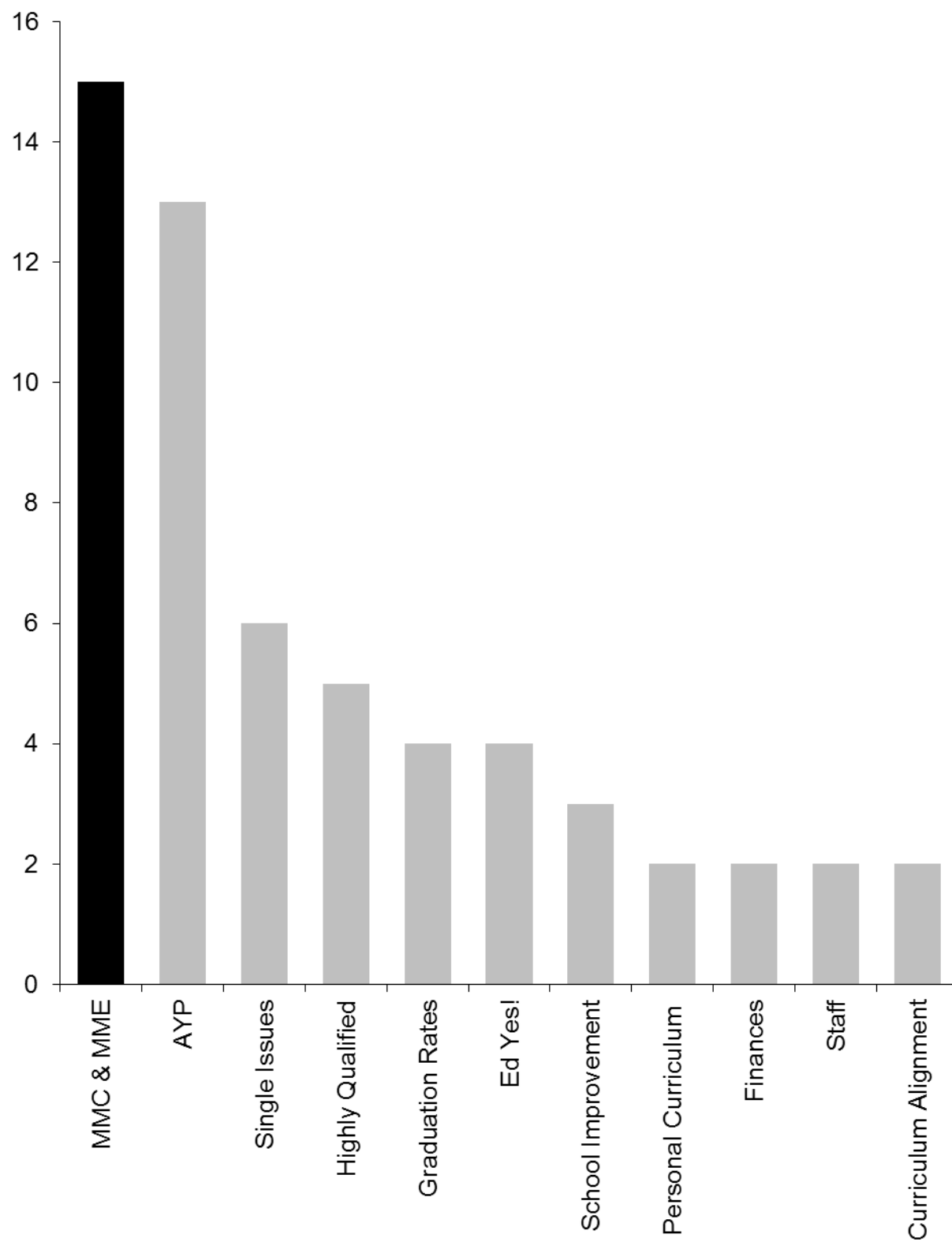
Figure 4.3: Combined MMC and MME concerns.

I think the level of expectations is good. To head a school and state that these kids shouldn't be able to do this is a problem. Most troubling, is they haven't given us enough flexibility in meeting this requirement. The personal curriculum gives us outs for the really smart kid to do something extra; and the personal curriculum lets us take care of our special needs students. It doesn't help us with a below average student that just doesn't excel in math.

This same level of agreement with the MMC is not universally shared among interviewees:

I disagree with the governor's philosophy that all of our students should be college ready; and because of that, all of our kids have to have chemistry or physics; all of our kids have to have algebra II, I think it is wrong. I think it is very shortsighted on her part.

While far lower in concern than Adequate Yearly Progress, it is interesting to note that concern with the Michigan Merit curriculum elicited nearly the same number of actions, 61, taken by principals as did Adequate Yearly Progress (65).

Out of the list of 58 concerns, seven concerns (12%) were related to the MME. Five high school principals included in this study had concerns with the Michigan Merit Exam. Two building leaders listed the MME as their main concern among all of the new accountability measures. Four of the five school leaders with concerns about the MME made adequate yearly progress during the 2007-08 school year. One principal explained his concern:

My top concern would differ from my central office's top concern. From a district standpoint, their big concern is obviously meeting AYP. To be quite frank, my concern, realizing the parameters that the federal government has set forth for us [is] nobody is going to be meeting AYP in a very short time; and I certainly see some flaws to the system, from an the accountability standpoint; is the ACT. I want our kids to be able to perform well on that test.

Actions taken in response to concerns over MME and MMC are pictured in Figure 4.4. Curriculum change and development actions, aside from being the most prevalent actions taken by building leaders in response to their concerns with MMC and
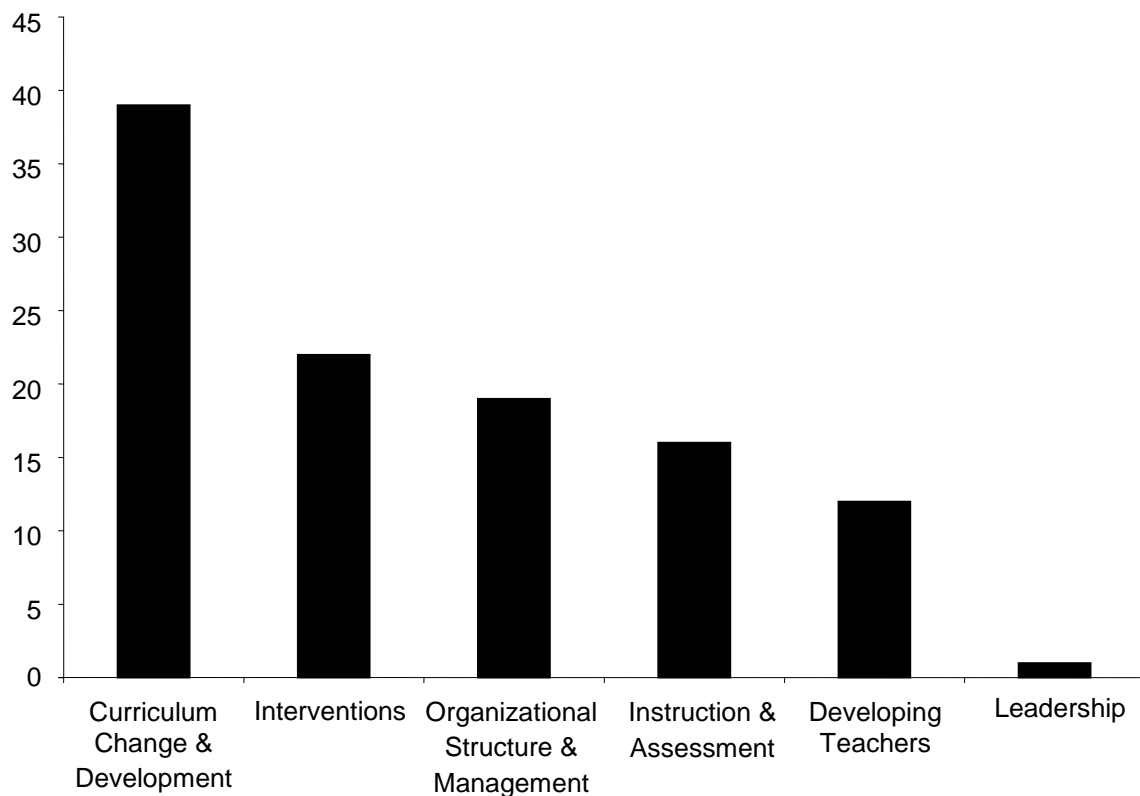
Figure 4.4: Actions taken in response to concerns over MME and MMC.

MME accounted for nearly double the amount of actions of the next two categories intervention and organizational structure and management.

Course and Curriculum Change

In response to concerns with the Michigan Merit Curriculum and Michigan Merit Exam, over a third of all principals' actions centered around Curriculum Change and Development. Actions in this area accounted for 39 of the 109 actions (36%) in this category. Table 4.7 lists the Course and Curriculum Change actions.

Sixty-four percent of the "Course and Curriculum Change" actions involved either course creation or course elimination. In general, courses that were eliminated tended

Table 4.7

Course and Curriculum Change Actions

Description of Action	Number of Occurrences	Number of participants that took these actions
Course Creation	15	7
Course Elimination	10	5
Curriculum Alignment	7	4
Scheduling/Sequencing	3	2
Test Preparation	3	2
Elimination of Academic Track	1	1

to be low level (such as pre-Algebra) or remedial (such as basic math). While

eliminating low-level courses has been a predominate action, principals are not

necessarily in agreement with it. One principal explained: "We've always had, in

essence, a three-track system and now we have two; that's where my concern lies. I

think it's going to catch up." Another principal explained the conflict in the following

manner:

> We had some really good math programs in there for kids who were more
> technical school or maybe community college… We've had to throw out some
> good science programs, like our physical science programs, and had to retool
> our chemistry program to actually create dual programs, now a college-bound
> chemistry and a non-college-bound. I don't want to say non-college-bound, but
> a chemistry light.

Courses that were created in response to concerns over the MME and MMC,

tended to the extremes, either advanced courses with significantly higher expectations

or support classes, taken concurrently with core classes, to assist students with

mastering the new MMC content, which is assessed on the MME. While advanced

courses are easy to conceptualize, the support classes are more varied. One principal

described his support classes as:

> …for our lowest functioning freshman there are actually two classes, one in skills and one in reading. The kids coming in the door will lose an elective and will have two math classes or two English classes for at least a semester. It will be just intensive reading strategies, almost as a last effort to get these kids to move up a reading level or two or a grade level or two in their math.

Seven Course and Curriculum Change actions involved curriculum alignment.

These actions fall into four categories: rewriting curriculum to incorporate MMC content

into classes and rewriting assessments to mimic format and content expectations in the

MMC; forcing MMC into current courses to "save" electives; changing the sequence of

courses, and, aligning high school curriculum with middle school curriculum. These four

categories are discussed below.

i. The most common action that principals took involved rewriting course curricula and assessments to ensure that all MME content expectations are addressed in the classroom. Principals also had teachers engaged in creating assessments that were aligned to the new MMC standards and also in a format similar to that the students will experience when they take the MME.

ii. One principal discussed his plan to save current English electives for seniors: "We are going to try and maintain our current elective programs for grade 12, but pushed out the requirements of 12th grade English into those electives because they have been very popular and rigorous classes."

iii. In an effort to ensure that students are prepared for the MME, many principals changed the traditional sequence of course offerings. For example,

Government was previously taught in 12th grade; it has now become an 11th grade class.

iv. The alignment of high school curriculum with middle school curriculum is now more important than ever. In order to meet all the science expectations, many high school principals moved earth science to 8th grade. One school leader in the study even moved Algebra I to 8th grade so that all incoming freshmen begin with Geometry. One principal pointed out a conflict in aligning the high school curriculum, which focuses on the MME, with the middle school curriculum, which focuses on the Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP) test:

We are getting killed on the 75 multiple choice grammar questions. It's forced us, in a positive way, to go back to the statewide curriculum and say okay where is this taught. Oh, it's taught in middle school. Okay, go to the middle school and meet with them only to find out they don't do that [grammar] because the MEAP doesn't test it. The MEAP tests the creativity in their [students] writing so they do not teach grammar and punctuation at the middle school. So now we have to pick it up at the high school and try to fit it into the curriculum someplace, where there really isn't room for it.

Actions involving scheduling accounted for 8% of the Course and Curriculum Change actions taken by building leaders in response to concerns with MME and MMC. Actions taken within this category ranged from minor adjustments such as the sequence of science classes to "we are looking at [I have implemented] geometry for all kids in grade 9 regardless of how you do in eighth grade algebra." The remaining three actions centered around test preparation for the Michigan Merit Exam. Two of the three actions involved the creation of an ACT (part of the MME) test preparation class.

Interventions

Twenty percent of the actions taken in response to the Michigan Merit Curriculum and the Michigan Merit Exam involved "Intervention" actions. Specifically there were 22 actions identified in this study. See Table 4.8 for the complete analysis

Six actions (27%) addressed extending the school day either before or after the normal day. Two approaches are used with the extended day. The first approach is optional -- to extend the day by adding a "zero hour" and/or a seventh hour for students who want to "sign up". The other approach is mandatory -- "we are going to do it after school, and they are mandated to do [it], which will basically go 10 weeks. We

Table 4.8

Breakdown of Intervention Actions for the Michigan Merit Curriculum

Description of Action	Number of Occurrences	Number of participants that took these actions
Extended Day	6	3
Online Learning Requirement	4	3
Looping	3	2
Raise Awareness	2	1
Targeted Assistance	2	2
Credit Recovery During School Day	1	1
Develop Some Program	1	1
Proficiency Testing	1	1
Remediation	1	1
Tutoring	1	1

struggled a little bit with that." Whichever method is utilized, these five principals have

concluded that increasing student learning and credit recovery is their responsibility.

"The seven hour option did force us to do something we should have been doing

anyway, which was to offer some seventh hour options to kids. But it doesn't change the

whole structure of your day."

Creating online opportunities for students was identified in four actions. Three

unique strategies were discussed. Two schools have incorporated online learning within

the school day. One school utilized the online program as the primary means of

instruction, "I've recycled kids into a do-over algebra online [class] this semester. We're

just turning on the computers like yesterday". Another school blended the online

instruction with traditional instruction: "We have incorporated a new [program]. It's called

Apenjia learning, so the students will go to the library computer lab two days a week to

remediate their skills and get direct instruction three days a week." Another technology-

based approach is to allow students to complete the classes on their own time with the

school paying for it. "Credit recovery using Plato has turned math into what I call Math

Plato… We probably recover anywhere from 30 to 50 credits a year using it the way that

we use it. Just last year we had probably 15 or 16 kids that were able to walk and

graduate on time because of Plato."

There were three instances where the action involved placing the students

immediately back into the course they failed without making them wait an entire year to

do so. One interview discussed what this entailed for him:

> Next year, we are going to actually put some relooping in, which I think is one of
> the strong points of a trimester, where you have that built in already. With
> semesters, I am going to have to schedule classes with no students in them. I am
> going to be looking at my failure rates, for all of my freshman/sophomore classes,

and, if I've got X number this year and last year and the year before, I'm going to say well, my nine sections are going to become 8 second semester and I am going to have a first semester class. We have not done that before and we are going to look at doing that.

This approach to scheduling is problematic, since, if the number of students and sections do not work out as anticipated, it leads to costly overages (paying teachers to teach on their preparation time). It can also require major changes to student schedules, a task which generally necessitates hand scheduling students during the year and figuring out what to have the teachers teach in order to fill their schedules.

Targeted student assistance actions presented a dichotomy of new and old ideas. Some principals lamented having to cease actions that were helpful:

If you took the MME [sic High School MEAP] in the spring of your junior year and you didn't pass it, then as a senior, in the fall, we would actually take a look at those kids that were close to passing and ask teachers if they knew the student, to take them under their wing and kind of mentor them, and do some extra things to encourage them. We gained a lot of ground from the spring testing to the fall senior retakes. Now that those [retake examinations] are eliminated, we are not doing that.

Other principals speculated about actions that they would like to take such as: "what I hope to do is based on PLAN (a pre-ACT test) results this year. I am going to identify tenth graders based on their results that we can target for some extra help. I haven't figured out exactly how we are going to do it."

Organizational Structure and Management

The Organizational Structure and Management category had 19 actions in it associated with the Michigan Merit Curriculum and Michigan Merit Exam. These actions are shown in Table 4.9.

Table 4.9

Organizational Structure and Management Actions for the MMC and MME

Description of Action	Number of Occurrences	Number of participants that took these actions
Scheduling Issues	6	3
Creating Procedures	5	4
Graduation Requirements	3	1
Staffing Shifts	3	1
Attendance Issues	2	1

Six organizational structure and management actions involved scheduling issues, which covered a broad range of topics. Two participants noted a change from semesters to trimesters: A school was coming from a block schedule to a trimester schedule; and the other school was on a traditional semester schedule moving to a trimester schedule. While these changes were arguably the most significant in terms of changing the school structure, they did not constitute the bulk of actions in this category. Other actions included having 8th graders come to the high school to take algebra; creating one larger high school as a result of closing an alternative high school; mandating all juniors take economics; and creating equity in teaching schedules by not having any one person teach all of the high or low level classes.

Five of the organizational structure and management actions centered on creating procedures. These procedures covered issues such as personal curriculum (modifying the Michigan Merit Curriculum for an individual student as allowed by law), proficiency testing (state law forcing schools to grant credit to any student who can

obtain a grade of C+ or better on an end of course assessment regardless of any other factor), and collecting lesson plans. Regarding the lesson plans, this principal explains his rationale as follows:

> …While I haven't been much on collecting lesson plans, for the last year or two I've required them to turn in their act lesson plans and I log it. If I don't have it I e-mail them and say, 'I need it. Where is it?' It kind of puts some pressure and makes sure they are holding up their end of the bargain.

The implementation of math support classes has appeared previously in the analysis of actions taken in response to concerns with the AYP. Math support reappears with the discussion of concerns with the MMC and MME and organizational structure and management actions. This time the emphasis is on the procedures surrounding the support class rather than on course creation. One school leader explained:

> I have actually approached my assistant superintendent and asked about the possibility of actually building some type of math support class into our master schedule; so that the kids that are in eighth grade this year and take the Explore [a pre ACT assessment], if they score low in the area of math, that we can actually remove an elective from their freshman year and put them into a math support class, in order to help get them through algebra.

The three actions labeled graduation requirements are mundane. While it is true that prior to the MMC, Michigan as a state only required a course in government for graduation, the MMC required graduation requirements more rigorous than in many high schools in Genesee County. Most of the actions related to graduation requirements accounted for the dramatic increase in math credits including Algebra, Geometry, Algebra II, and a fourth year math course. One school leader noted he reduced the physical education requirement from one credit to a half credit due to the increased total number of credits and eliminated the option of sports counting for a PE credit. This principal explained, "There were waivers for PE if students participated in marching

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band or sports. We've gotten rid of those since they didn't touch on all of the standards and benchmarks [for physical education]."

Three staff shifts actions centered on the need for additional highly qualified teachers to meet the demands of the new curriculum. One principal discussed a staff issue that arose from the new highly qualified teacher requirements. He made the decision (based on a lack of highly qualified special education teacher in the core content areas) to move special education students out of the resource room and into the general education setting utilizing a co-teaching approach:

> I've done scheduling this year since we were going to all inclusion and building my entire master schedule around the co-teachers. I have three teachers working in science with one special education teacher. I made sure they all had the same prep so they had the ability to plan together. It sounds simple, but it screwed up a lot of things.

Remaining Categories

Together the remaining three categories, "Developing Teachers", "Instructional Targeting, Development, and Assessment", and "Leadership," contain only 29 actions. Both of the Leadership actions involved increasing the principals' knowledge regarding the two accountability systems, state (MME) and federal (NCLB).

Instructional Targeting, Development, and Assessment

Actions taken in response to concerns with the Michigan Merit Exam that were classified as "Instructional Targeting, Development, and Assessment" primarily focused on test preparation. The remaining actions were diffuse, covering a range of topics. Table 4.10 provides a more detailed analysis of these actions.

Table 4.10

Instructional Targeting, Development, and Assessment for the MME

Description of Action	Number of Occurrences	Number of participants that took these actions
Test Preparation	7	3
Common Assessments	3	2
Grammar Instruction	2	1
Identifying Power Standards	2	2
Differentiating Instruction	1	1
Specific Outside Curriculum	1	1

Seven of the 16 Instructional Development and Assessment actions involved test preparation. These actions included: class warm-up activities involving ACT preparation, specific ACT preparation lesson plans, and after-school tutoring on test preparation strategies. The following are test preparation strategies from two principals:

> Just before the window closes on saying the word ACT out loud in public, we are pulling the kids out - all the juniors are being pulled out over a four-day period to hit math, English, science and social studies

and

> each department has kind of developed their own prep type things. For instance, in math they do ten ACT questions in 10 minutes and they do that every Friday, probably starting in October/November just to get the kids used to the timing.

The remaining nine actions were spread over five categories: grammar, power standards (identifying standards most significant and likely to be tested), common assessments, differentiated instruction, and using a specific curriculum (such as the Kent County Curriculum which was written to address the MMC and MME).

Developing Teachers

There were 12 actions that resulted from concerns with the MMC and MME that involved Developing Teachers. These strategies ranged from fairly general approaches of "going through our curriculum with the teachers" to more intensive ones such as "we had a lady from the Red Cedar Writing Project at Michigan State come in and in-service our staff specifically on ACT writing". These actions are further detailed in Table 4.11.

Two principals discussed the following strategy. Following data analysis, teachers shared best practices with each other: "One teacher said, 'I do this lab; it helps the kids understand this,' and the other teachers said, 'This is good; we need to do that'"; and "they broke into different departments and talked about test prep".

Brief Summary of Patterns in AYP and MME and MMC Analysis

High school principals' concerns with AYP, MME, and MMC resulted in more actions in Course and Curriculum Changes than in any other area. Building leaders,

Table 4.11

Developing Teachers Actions for the MMC

Description of Action	Number of Occurrences	Number of participants that took these actions
Curriculum Professional Development	4	3
Self Evaluation	3	2
Data Analysis	2	2
Test Preparation	2	2
Sharing Best Practices	1	1

who had concerns with adequate yearly progress, focused their actions predominately on issues of Instructional Targeting Development and Assessment; (32%), Course and Curriculum Changes (22%); and Organizational Structure and Management (20%). Additionally, the data showed that building leaders who had concerns with the MME and MMC focused on Curriculum Change and Development (36%); Organizational Structure and Management (17%); and Interventions (20%). This effectively means that building leaders focused their efforts on aligning the courses they offer in their buildings with Michigan's standards. The previous sections revealed the range of building leaders' efforts and strategies, which combined short term strategies with compliance with the law.

Analyses of the principal concerns and actions data revealed that across AYP or MME/MMC driven concerns, actions categorized as Developing Teachers and Leadership accounted for the fewest number of actions: 21 or 12%.

At this point, it is clear that high school principals in Genesee County have not focused their efforts at changing the quality of instruction in the classroom. This was an unexpected finding given the research on the effects of quality classroom instruction on student assessment.

Mid-Level and School Level Concerns

The participants in this study identified four mid-level concerns: Highly Qualified Staff, Graduation Rate, School Improvement and Education, Yes! To continue illustrating patterns of concerns and actions among principals, this section briefly summarizes and displays this data here.

Five interviewees had concerns regarding highly qualified teachers, which account for nine percent of the overall concerns identified in this study. According to NCLB requirements, secondary teachers must have either a major in the area(s) they teach or a minor and have passed an assessment demonstrating competency in the field. In some situations, teachers certified by the state of Michigan were no longer eligible to teach courses that they had taught for years, given the more stringent requirements of NCLB. This was particularly true for secondary special education teachers, most of whom did not have majors and/or minors with appropriate testing for the core content classes they had been teaching.

Graduation rates are also a factor in meeting the requirements for NCLB's Adequate Yearly Progress and are measured and reported on the Michigan's Education, Yes! School Report Card. In both systems, high schools need to graduate at least 80% of each freshman class in a four-year period. Four principals identified concerns with graduation rate, accounting for 7% of the concerns identified by participants in this study.

Three school leaders identified school improvement as a concern. For the 2007-08 school year, the North Central Accreditation Association (NCA) came out with a new model for school accreditation. The new NCA model aligns with the State of Michigan's accreditation process. Schools may now have a NCA site visit called a Quality Assurance Review. During the two school years, 2008-09 and 2007-08, some schools have entered into this new and not well understood process.

The final mid-level concern is related to Michigan's accountability system, Education, Yes! Four interviews listed Education Yes! as a concern, which accounts for

7% of the overall concerns listed. There are 12 actions associated with concerns with

Education, Yes! Table 4.12 shows the frequency of concerns, and Table 4.13 shows the

disparate nature of these actions through summary descriptions.

Table 4.12

Frequency of Mid-Level Concerns

Concern	Number of principals with concern	Number of actions taken
Highly Qualified	5	17
Graduation Rate	4	17
School Improvement	3	11
Education Yes!	3	12

School Level Concerns

Ten principals in this study shared concerns that were either unique to that

individual or only were shared by one other building leader. The four concerns:

curriculum alignment; finance; personal curriculum; and staff issues were each identified

by two participants in this study. It is interesting to note that these four concerns

encompass six of the thirteen schools. Table 4.14 provides an analysis of the actions

taken in response to these four concerns.

During the course of the interviews, five unique concerns were identified by five

principals. These concerns were: (1) Michigan's interpretation of NCLB standards;

(2) staffs' understanding of all the accountability measures and how these measures

Table 4.13

Display of Categorized Actions Taken by Building Leaders in Response to Mid-Level Concerns

	Highly Qualified	Grad Rates	School Improvement	Ed Yes
Instructional Targeting and Alignment		Worked on differentiating instruction Looked at Response to Intervention	Had students take some practice ACT tests Allowed teachers and students to use scantrons on tests to get used to that format	Implemented common assessments Had very specific test preparation strategies Implemented a test prep class for targeted students Held Saturday test preparation for students who wanted to come and pay for it
Course and Curriculum changes	Eliminated a class because school did not have anyone HQ to teach it. Eliminated basic general education math classes.	Used Title I dollars to implement reading and math intervention classes and have parent groups.		Got rid of remedial math classes and adding math support classes to be taken concurrently
Org Structure and Management	Created portfolio system to get teachers HQ.	Familiarized myself with the laws regarding special education	Left if out of my building leadership function	Had staff look at what we are doing Staff filled out self assessment

Table 4.13 (Continued)

	Changed teaching schedules	Created personal curriculums	Documented decision making.	
	Changed focus on hiring decisions (x3)	Implemented positive behavior support	Decided on whether or not to stay in NCA	
	Created a record keeping system	Tried to remain in position of principal	Used the data received from the MME	
	Let go a teacher who could not become HQ	Tried to keep school open	Set goals for school improvement	
	Restricted the students who can take math with special education teacher		Created sub-committees of teachers to work on goals	
	Moved towards a team teaching approach with special education teachers (x2)		Was more conscious of how we are trying to tie things together	
	Built schedule around teachers' HQ areas (union issue)			

Table 4.13 (Continued)

	Found quality teachers who are also HQ and willing to work in this school Had to do demeaning things to good professionals who chose a different path Sent letter to parents informing them that their child's teacher is not HQ			
Interventions		Online credit recovery Set up an alternative high school Individualized student support from teachers Online credit recovery		Taped curriculum night to share DVD with parents who were unable to attend Parent staff electronic interface to exchange information.

Table 4.13 (Continued)

		Implemented a freshman academy that included two hours of reading daily Academic support for freshman Held kids in 8th grade at ms alternative site and have them work on 9th grade curriculum Earlier identification of students who need help		
Leadership			Purposefully did nothing	
Teacher Development	As a result of PLC time teachers were able to use HOUSE option of 90 professional development hours to become HQ (negative implication from principal)	Have professional learning communities	Talking about how to help subgroups of students	Use indicators to educate staff of expectations Use self assessment to build consensus of strengths and weakness. Discussed the indicators

will affect the school; (3) providing a safe and orderly environment; (4) attendance and proficiency; and (5) accountability at the subgroup level, particularly as it relates to "fairness," as the number of subgroups varies across schools and school districts. Table 4.14 also provides an analysis of the actions related to these unique concerns.

Summary of Patterns

When considering the current school accountability measures building leaders faced, AYP and MME and MMC were not only the main concerns, but were also the focus of the most actions. That is, principals in this study took the most actions in response to these frequently shared concerns. AYP accounted for 65 actions and these actions were fairly well distributed over the identified categories. The combined concerns of MME and MMC accounted for a combination of 106 actions. Mid-level concerns (56 actions) and building-level concerns (54 actions) accounted for the remaining 110 reported actions.

In contrast to leading concerns, actions taken in response to mid-level and school-specific concerns tended to involve a smaller number of actions, and these actions clustered heavily into the Organizational Structure and Management category. Forty-eight percent of all actions taken in response to mid-level concerns and 44% all actions taken in response to building-level concerns fell into this category (as compared to only 18% of top concerns).

On the positive side, this may suggest that complex concerns related to teaching and learning may now dominate principals' attention, while managerial concerns are starting to take a secondary place. As another phenomenon of this, Course and

Table 4.14

Actions Taken for Unique Building-Level Concerns

	Instructional Targeting and Alignment	Course and Curriculum changes	Org Structure and Manage-ment	Interven-tions	Leader-ship	Teacher Develop-ment
Curriculum alignment	XXXXXX	XX	XXX			
Finances	X		XXXXXX XXXX			X
Personal Curriculums			XXXX		XX	X
Staff Issues			XX			XXXX
State's Interpretation of NCLB Standards			X		XX	
Staffs' understanding of what this all means and how to apply it	XX	X	X		XX	
Providing a safe and orderly environment			XXX			
Attendance and proficiency				XXXXX		
Subgroups				X		

Note: Each X represents one action.

Curriculum Change actions accounted for 30% of primary concern actions, but only 7 mid-level and building-level concerns.

In all, the basic distribution study data provide one small view of principals' concerns and actions as they relate to multiple accountability policies. Elements of policies that carry the greatest risk and weight are consuming a greater and greater amount of principals' attention and driving them to implement multiple actions and changes in the hope of achieving improved outcomes.

An interesting theme emerged concerning building-level concerns. Principals in this study who identified concerns that were either unique to their school or shared with only one other school, tended to focus their actions in predominantly one area. The data did not reveal actions that applied to multiple areas. Perhaps issues of local concern do not have the same pressures on them so they do not drive as many actions by building leaders.

While some patterns emerge from this picture, it also presents a rather noisy collection of actions that are seemingly rational, but not clearly part of some sort of coherent plan or process. Chapter 5 considers this and other possible interpretations of this data.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS

Data analyses in this chapter consider patterns among actions taken and not taken by school leaders. The chapter begins with summative displays of actions taken by building leaders and the distribution of actions by types of schools. Initial analyses consider possible meanings or implications of these distributions for principals' thinking about developing the performance of their schools.

A second section considers the implications of less represented actions in the data. Themes in this section speak to observations of a heavy emphasis by leaders on largely structural, technical approaches to improving the instructional core, weak evidence of clear, diagnostic thinking on the part of school leaders and disconnections between actions and long-term planning. Also considered are intersections of data suggesting a certain cautiousness in leader actions on one hand, but expectations about the speed or rate of changes on the other.

In all, the study argues that high schools leaders confronted with new accountability demands are responding to them by making many rational, technical changes to their organizations, but appear to do so absent much careful diagnosis of underlying problems or a systemic approach to school improvement.

Analytic Overview of the Data

A large majority of actions taken across the sample of school leaders addressed a small set of concerns shared by almost all building leaders. That is, 82% of the actions taken by school leaders where taken in response to top or mid-level concerns. Concerns that were specific to one or only a few schools accounted for only 18% of the

overall actions identified. Table 5.1 shows the percentage of actions taken by action category.

In general, the accountability policies enacted by NCLB and Education Yes! elicited fairly logical, aligned actions. For example, concerns over AYP led schools to review instruction and target efforts and interventions to perceived areas of weakness. Responses to concerns with the MMC focused in large part, on course and curriculum changes such as the elimination of courses that did not align with the new requirements and rewriting elective course content to incorporate the new expectations in an effort to save the course. One principal pointed out "we are going to try and maintain our current

Table 5.1

Percentage of Actions Taken by Building Leaders in Response to Top or Mid-Level Concerns, Separated by Categories

	AYP	MME	MMC	HQ	Grad Rates	SI	Ed Yes	Total Actions
Course and Curriculum Change	22	29	41	12	6		8	25
Developing Teachers	5	17	5	6	6	9	25	9
Instructional Targeting, Development, and Assessment	32	27	5		12	18	33	19
Interventions	14	13	26		47		17	18
Leadership	8	0	2			9		3
Organizational Structure and Management	20	15	21	82	29	64	17	26
Total Actions (n)	**65**	**48**	**61**	**17**	**17**	**11**	**12**	**231**

elective program for grade 12 but push out the requirements of 12th grade English into
those elective courses. Those elective courses have been very popular and rigorous
classes. Some of the electives will have to incorporate some of those pieces of 12th
grade English in order to survive." Responses to concerns with graduation rate evoked
an emphasis on interventions such as online credit recovery and/or placement into
alternative programs. One participant utilizes both options with his/her students. "We
basically have two routes [for students behind in credits] from now on. One of them is
after-school credit recovery using Plato [online learning]. The other option is our
alternative school."

No single category of action emerged as significantly more prevalent than all
others, but changes in organizational structure and management lead the list. This
pattern echoes many observations of school reform and improvement efforts that argue
that structural changes to school often dominate change efforts, even though they have
a relatively weak record of success at altering the instructional core of schooling
(Cuban, 1984; Elmore, 1996; Tyack & Tobin, 1994). The three other leading categories
of actions -- course and curriculum change; instructional targeting, development and
assessment, and interventions – were reasonably distributed across concerns.

Distribution of Actions by Types of School

Exposure to deductive disclosure places limitations on some disaggregation of
the data that might be informative. Still, it is possible to look at a few patterns by
subgroups. For example, analyses considered differences between schools that did and
did not make AYP and by Michigan School Report Card Grades. Table 5.2 shows the

distribution of actions, by percentage, of schools that did and did not make AYP in the year prior to the study.

The six schools that did not make AYP accounted for 101 actions compared to the 128 for the seven schools that made AYP. The largest differences in action patterns appear in the areas of course curriculum change, and instructional targeting, development, and assessment. Schools that did not make AYP focused 33.7% of their top actions on course curriculum and change compared to 18.0% for schools that made AYP. Conversely, schools that made AYP spent 22.7% of their top actions focusing on instructional targeting, development, and assessment compared to 15.8% for schools not making AYP. Schools not making AYP were doing more with scheduling and adding courses to better prepare kids for the current standards; schools making AYP were doing more with targeted types of student interventions.

Table 5.2

Percentage of Actions by Schools Making and Not Making AYP

	Not Making AYP (6 schools)	Making AYP (7 schools)
Course and Curriculum Change	34	18
Developing Teachers	7	11
Instructional Targeting, Development, & Assessment	16	23
Interventions	15	19
Leadership	3	2
Organizational Structure and Management	26	27
Total Actions (n)	**101**	**128**

One of the policy aims of NCLB and resulting state policy was to leverage change in schools that are failing students academically (Kim, Orfield, & Sunderman, 2005). The Center on Education Policy published a paper in years immediately following the implementation of NCLB indicating that while it was not possible to identify strategies that were most effective at improving schools' academic performance, schools implementing more than four strategies for improvement over a two-year time span were more likely to meet AYP compared to those who implemented less (Scott, Kober, Rentner, and Jennings, 2005). The data in this study neither confirms nor disputes the Center of Education Policy's findings. Principals from schools not making AYP averaged 16.8 actions compared to principals from schools making AYP who averaged 18.3 actions. The next logical inquiry would consider any differences in the actions taken based upon the schools' Michigan School Report Card grade. Table 5.3 illustrates the percentage of actions taken in each category for schools by grade.

Perhaps the most interesting finding is that schools obtaining a Michigan School Report Card grade of B averaged the largest number of actions, 24.2 actions per school, compared to those earning an A (11.5 actions), C (15 actions), or D (12.5 actions).

To understand the implication of the number of actions taken as a function of Michigan School Report card grades, one must take into consideration the impact of AYP on Michigan School Report Card Grades. Failing to make AYP lowers a school's grade by one level (MDE, 2010b). Additionally, any school not making AYP cannot

Table 5.3

Percentage of Actions by Schools in Response to Michigan School Report Card Grade

	Report Card Grade			
	A	B	C	D
Course and Curriculum Change	39	26	18	24
Developing Teachers	0	12	8	4
Instructional Targeting, Development, & Assessment	26	17	30	4
Interventions	13	22	12	12
Leadership	4	0	3	12
Organizational Structure and Management	17	23	28	44
Total Actions (n)	**23**	**121**	**60**	**25**

obtain an overall grade of A ,whereas any school making AYP cannot receive a grade of D. This study points out that schools obtaining an overall grade of a B are taking twice as many actions compared to other possible grades. These schools either made AYP and understand if they do not continue to do so they will fall to a C the following year, or they did not make AYP and know that if they do so they will earn an A the following year.

Principals from schools earning an overall school grade of D while taking slightly more actions than their counterparts in schools earning overall grades of A have focused their efforts in different areas. Principals in schools with an overall grade of a D have focused their actions on organizational structure and management (44%) and course and curriculum change (24%). Schools obtaining an overall A grade have

focused their actions on course and curriculum changes (39%) and instructional targeting, development, and assessment (26%). Unfortunately, the schools needing to make the largest gains in student achievement are relying on structural changes that research has shown to be the least promising (Cuban, 1984; Elmore, 1996).

This study points out that policy can create a situation where some building leaders are more prone than other leaders are to taking action. This situation involves the combined elements of AYP, Michigan School Report Card Grades, and NCLB's requirement of public reporting. Unfortunately, this combination of policy does not encourage the lowest performing schools to take increased actions to improve.

Summary of Data

This study suggests that the concerns and actions taken by high school principals corresponded with policy elements that carried the highest stakes for their schools. Stated areas of concern were backed up with a variety of actions aimed at addressing each concern. Out of the 284 actions identified in this study, principals identified 16 instances where the actions they were taking conflicted with their personally beliefs about education, 26 instances where the actions were deemed critical improvements, and 33 instances where the actions were considered strategic gamesmanship. AYP (5 actions) and MMC (6 actions) accounted for the bulk of actions that conflicted with participants' personal beliefs. Personal conflicts with actions concerning AYP included actions emphasizing test scores as a measure of success and special education subgroup issues. Principals' personal conflict with MMC actions centered around whether the increased requirements are actually best for all students. Actions that were deemed critical improvements included those that targeted students

for additional help. Seven out of the thirteen principals interviewed specifically noted at least one critical improvement in the area of their primary concern. Only one participant claimed to be making critical improvements in all five areas of his concerns. The 33 identified issues of gamesmanship covered 26 areas of concern. Seven out of the thirteen principals in this study acknowledged strategic game playing in the area of their primary concern. The two highest areas of gamesmanship involved test preparation and issues with teachers' highly qualified status. Most principals noted that these actions were an unfortunate necessity of addressing their concerns.

Accountability policies were effective at stimulating action in schools, but, ironically, they appear to stimulate as much action, if not more, in schools with lower risks and perceived pressures. It appears that the pressure of state sanctions is less salient than community or internal school pressure to maintain a Michigan School Report Card Grade of a B or better. This finding contradicts Hanushek and Raymond's (2004) finding that while reporting overall results had minimal impact on school performance, the "force" of accountability policy comes from attaching monetary awards or threats of takeover to school performance. The implication is that school accountability policy that engages community and/or school expectations to remain above a set criteria is more effective than the threat of sanctions.

This finding answers the research question concerning the prioritizing of pressures from multiple accountability policies. Michigan's Education Yes! is having a greater impact on high school principals in Genesee County than NCLB's AYP requirement. It should be noted that NCLB calls for the creation and reporting of school report cards but leaves the implementation up to individual states. This study finds that

the top concerns of high school principals -- AYP, MME, and MMC – account for the greatest number of actions. Additionally, only slightly more actions are being taken by schools not making AYP compared to schools making AYP. A relatively uniform number of actions were taken by school obtaining school report card grades of A's, C's, and D's while a notable increases in actions is being taken by high school principals whose schools earned B grades. Concerns with Michigan School Report Card Grades, for school obtaining a grade of B, are having the greatest influence on actions taken in high schools.

Interpreting Patterns of Action and Inaction

Piecemeal versus Systemic Action

While leaders' actions could be described as logical and aligned, data collected and analyzed from the study did not provide much evidence that leaders were working from a careful diagnosis of underlying sources of low performance or some vision for long-term systemic improvement. Rather, they appeared to be responding as quickly as possible to readily measured symptoms. For example, there is little to no mention of actions to better understand what was occurring at the instructional core of their school or to develop a systemic plan of improvement. As discussed below, leaders appeared to enact multiple changes across their organizations that rationally matched to accountability pressures. They appeared to do so, however, without any guiding theory or strategy about long-term school improvement. Additionally, principals did not often seem secure or confident that their actions would work, either alone or in combination. Only 26 out of the 284 actions identified in this study were labeled as critical

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improvements by building leaders. Conversely, 33 actions were highlighted as strategic

game playing on their part. One principal shared this sentiment while discussing AYP:

> It's more rhetoric than anything because nothing is perfect and we are never going to get there. So although it might be a laudable goal it doesn't make sense realistically that the standards set by the state for everybody are going to be met.

Taken altogether, it appears that principals are taking actions that "look good" but which

they honestly do not believe will make significant changes.

Effecting Change to the Instructional Core

The top concerns of building leaders -- Adequate Yearly Progress, Michigan

Merit Curriculum, and the Michigan Merit Exam -- strongly suggest that the study

participants saw improved student achievement (as measured by test scores) as their

primary task. One principal summed up the sentiment with the comment: "Everything

that we do with our programs: curriculum, instruction, and professional development is

geared around improving test scores." But, research on how best to teach students at

the high school level is considered weak by many (Center on Instruction, 2010;

Schoenfeld, 2006; Single, 1991). Moreover, existing research is often not readily

familiar or available to building leaders. In this light, it is not surprising that the evidence

collected here suggested that the predominant strategy for improving student

achievement was a fairly technocratic one, mainly to modify and align course offerings

and course curricula to new tests and learning standards. For example, the majority of

Course and Curriculum Change actions centered on aligning course offerings and

standards to the Michigan Merit Curriculum. Eleven out of thirteen principals reported

implementing new courses or programs in the year prior to or during the study. The

same number of principals reported eliminating programs and courses during this time.

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Of the 59 actions categorized as Course and Curriculum Change in Chapter 4, 39 actions were taken by ten principals in response to concerns with the Michigan Merit Curriculum and Exam. One principal pointed out they "had to retool our chemistry program to actual create dual programs that resulted in a college bound chemistry and non-college bound…chemistry light". Another participant pointed out "we have had to redo all of our curriculum writing and assessment writing to make sure all of the standards and content expectations of the MMC are addressed in the classroom."

Beyond alignment, another prevalent action was the addition of support classes for at-risk students, An example is a supplemental, online math support class that targeted students took concurrently with their required math class. The online program identified weaknesses and created individualized lessons for each student, who spent part of the course online, and part of it with a math teacher. This strategy highlights concerns identified by scholars over the narrowing of the curriculum for some students (Siskin, 2003; Wood, 2004). Seven principals in this study identified supplemental classes that they have added to their schools course offerings.

Less frequent than actions redesigning course and curriculum but still prevalent were decisions by leaders to press teachers to develop and use common classroom assessments. This action was typically cited in reference to ensuring that the students were being taught the same material. One principal pointed out:

> We have common assessments. I am always assessing the cumulative GPA of [teacher's] classes versus their scores on the exam…To be honest some of them are just lazy. It is easier to get this far, then quit [as opposed to covering the content identified by the school or department as essential].

At the same time, only one principal shared an example of using the data collected from common assessments to drive changes in classroom instruction or to press teachers to

examine the effectiveness of instructional strategies in use (though one interviewee mentioned a desire to have teachers study their common assessment outcomes to consider weak areas in their teaching). Overall, the focus of common assessment was alignment to standards, but the use of common assessments as a teacher and instructional development tools was not voiced or discussed by any of the interviewed leaders.

Changes to curriculum and course assessments were far more prevalent in the data than references to changes to instruction. On the surface, the number of actions coded as Instructional Targeting, Development and Assessment came close to the number coded as Course and Curriculum Changes 50 and 59 respectively. A dig into the data shows, however, that 80% of these actions involved Targeting and Assessment tactics such as beginning each class with a warm-up activity that focuses on ACT review, holding a one- hour review session covering some portion of the MME for the past two weeks, requiring teachers to turn in ACT test preparation lesson plans, and requiring ACT test preparation classes. These actions might certainly assist students, but they suggest little direct challenge to core instructional strategies and practices of teachers. Only 10 of the 50 actions focused directly on Instructional Development. These actions included providing extra training for our algebra teachers to differentiate instruction, identification of power standards, and having ISD curriculum coordinator work with teachers to understand MME scores.

It was also noted that, when talking about instruction, the actions mentioned by school leaders were fairly vague. For example, one school leader reported that "we are working on differentiated instruction" and "…looking at our response to intervention".

One leader's lone reference to actions connected to instruction was a request: "We've asked teachers to change or tweak some of their teaching styles". Even comments that seemed more thoughtful about developing teachers' instructional capabilities often drifted from the core issue. For example, speaking to his/her primary concerns, one leader shared: "We have had to do a lot more professional development so that our students are prepared, because the only way you can affect AYP is to affect the quality of the student that is sitting down to take the test."

Enhancing classroom instruction and changing teacher behaviors is a difficult and time consuming task that often frustrates and stymies leaders (Elmore, 1996) Several principals' comments about improving instruction included comments about conflicts with teachers unions. One principal talked about the human cost of having to tell a teacher, who had been successfully teaching for 20+ years, that he had to change the content of his course.

In all, the data suggest that while leaders recognize improved student achievement as their most important task, they leaned on largely structural actions to bring about improvements to the instructional core. While research suggests that these actions are often a key part of any comprehensive effort to improve a school's instructional program and outcomes, they are not known to have large effects on their own (Cuban, 1990; Tyack & Cuban, 1995; Tyack & Tobin, 1994). Thus, many of the actions taken do not suggest changes that would substantially challenge and influence standards of teachers' instructional practices.

As has much previous research (Bevoise, 1984; DuFour, 2002; Elmore, 2000) the study suggests that high school leaders feel uncertain of themselves as instructional

leaders and unclear about how to confront complex teaching and learning challenges. They are comfortable taking actions they see and hear around them, but still do not seemed certain that they work. Said one, "We've had our teachers go through professional development. We are doing Marazano training; we've got Monica Verplank…But we do it and then they go back in the classroom and they don't utilize or implement anything."

Thinking and Acting Diagnostically

An analysis of the data also raises questions about the degree to which the interviewed high school principals were thinking and acting in a particularly diagnostic manner about the roots of weak performance outcomes. For example, there is little in the study data suggesting increased data analysis routines in the schools. One possible reason for this may be the lack of information that Michigan High Schools receive regarding student performance on the MME. The state provides information on how many students were proficient and even how close students are to becoming proficient, but the MME does not provide much useful information on individual student strengths and weaknesses. It was somewhat surprising that no building leader discussed the need for an assessment program that would allow teachers to analyze student achievement at a level from which specific instructional interventions can be made.

It is important to understand the difference between insufficient data analysis presented here and the abundant instructional targeting actions previously examined. The point I am making is that principals are taking actions absent a true diagnostic sense of the problem. Using mathematics as an example, principals understand that their students are not doing well. Principals' targeted actions involve identifying students

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who perform poorly on tests for increased numbers of required mathematics courses. The notion of providing additional time for students who have demonstrated poor performance is the target intervention. This differs greatly from understanding, for example, that students at a high school have demonstrated a tendency to not understand the point-slope form of a line and working with the teacher(s) to insure that the concept is being taught correctly and reinforced throughout the curriculum. Absent a deep diagnostic sense of the problems, principals are limited to general actions.

Another example of building leaders not advancing more strategic use of data was evidence in discussions concerning common assessments Many principals brought up common assessments when discussing curriculum alignment. Only one principal in the study discussed tracking student responses as a means of gathering information on which standards students had mastered or needed additional instruction on. If high school principals were pursuing improvements efforts form a deep diagnostic sense, common assessments would be used for understanding deficiencies in student learning rather than teacher compliance in following the curriculum. In theory, a principal or teacher, after analyzing results from common assessments, could identify areas where content was not mastered and provided immediate specific re-teaching or reinforcement of key concepts. Absent this analytical data, it is difficult for building leaders to develop stronger understandings of the sources of unsatisfactory instruction and student achievement.

Unclear Connections to Planning Processes

Throughout the study, one striking finding has been the sheer number of actions that building leaders were taking and the seemingly loose connections to any

coordinated long-term improvement plan. While the interview protocol used in the study did not expressly ask principals to describe their school improvement planning priorities and processes, at no time did they connect the actions they described to formal improvement plan requirements. School improvement plans, required by the State of Michigan, are supposed to identify areas in need of improvement and include strategies for improvement. Presumably there would be strong overlap between the concerns identified by leaders and their improvement plans. But references to plans were, oddly, never made in this context. The intimation here is that many of the actions displayed in Chapter 4 were more often implemented (or abandoned) in a piecemeal fashion than as part of a plan for sustained school improvement active in leaders' minds. The three building leaders that did reference school improvement plans did not allude to improvement and accountability concerns as much as the role of formal improvement plans in NCA accreditation process. Moreover, two of the three references to NCA and school improvement plans described *dysfunctional* conditions of school improvement planning despite the state law requiring it. (The third leader's concerns centered on uncertainty of participating for the first time in the NCA Quality Assurance Review.)

Further analysis of the interview data showed six leaders making references to other types of planning. For example, one principal spoke about the critical improvement of curricular planning to ensure that pacing is set to include their identified educational strategies. Other references were from five building leaders discussing either NCA or finances. Of the two principals who discussed NCA, the first principal cited past NCA plans as a justification for his school's current focus on writing, pointing out that writing has been part of the school's NCA plans for the past 20 years. The other

principal expressed his displeasure with NCA's current initiative to align with both state and federal accountability measures.

Formal school improvement plans required by the State of Michigan are not being used to guide action in schools in this study. No principal in this study made concrete connections from the school improvement plan to the actions they were taking. Aside from specific concerns with the process, one principal justified the continued emphasis on writing since it has been an area of emphasis for twenty years on the school improvement plan. The limited number of references to formal school improvement plans and processes in the interviews again underscores questions about the piecemeal versus systemic qualities of leaders' efforts to address concerns raised by new accountability pressures.

Uncertainty About Efficacy and Effectiveness

Another form of data supporting an interpretation that Genesee County's high school principals were struggling to respond to new accountability pressures more systemically was the seemingly viral yet random use or abandonment of particular actions or interventions. For example, data from this study shows instances where programs implemented in one school were similar to the programs being abandoned in others nearby. Required after-school classes, utilization of alternative education programs, and mandated support/remedial classes are three examples where at least one school has adopted a program that another school deemed ineffective. Moreover, many of the programs being implemented have little or no basis in research and lack much, if any, track record of success. Most of the programs cited in this study have not been implemented long enough to adequately determine their effectiveness. Programs

are being implemented, modified, and eliminated before anyone can ascertain their true affect. These patterns also suggest that, while well intentioned, many of these leaders seem to lack a very solid sense of the nature of their student performance programs or the types of action that would have the greatest positive effect upon them. Instead, many seemed to take actions that were circulating among other schools, even if or when they were being eliminated in others.

The speed with which many programs and actions were both implemented and abandoned was a unsettling finding of this study. While discussing his concerns with graduation rates, one principal noted recent changes at his school. During the previous school year, his English teachers created a freshman transition academy that, in effect, created an opportunity for an intensive two- period block for reading (9th grade English already had an emphasis on reading). When it "became evident that they didn't need the second hour of reading", these students were placed in an online credit recovery program during the second hour (which was the freshman transition academy). While he mentioned that other academic support was integrated into the freshman academy, he did not state what became of that academic support once the course was eliminated mid-year. This same principal is already proposing how next year he intends to target a select group of low performing eighth graders and retain these students in eighth grade while allowing the students to begin work on the ninth grade standards.

Another principal, while discussing his concerns with the Michigan Merit Curriculum, talked about the various transformations his targeted support program has taken. When students were allowed to retake the state exam required of all 11th grade students, students who did not score at a proficient level were "re-looped into a class as

a senior" to master the skills they failed to demonstrate. The principal admitted that this program did not work. The following year this same principal implemented a mandatory 8-10 week after-school program for students who failed to demonstrate proficiency on the state exam. Numerous problems such as transportation and attendance arose that necessitated dropping the after-school program. As a result the after-school program was replaced with a required on-line program offered during the school day. For next year, this principal is switching from the on-line program in favor of a looping approach with a teacher in the building. He also is developing a freshman "skills" class that will focus on intensive reading skills as a "last effort to get their reading level up one or two grade levels".

A third principal discussed changes to his remediation program, citing differences in philology from his predecessor who was "always trying to find a way around the system". He eliminated required courses for students who did not demonstrate proficiency on the state test. In its place, supplemental classes were added for targeted students to take concurrently with required classes. Mandatory in-school test preparation review sessions were eliminated, while required test preparation classes were instituted for students scoring below a set level on ACT PLAN test. Optional weekend ACT preparation sessions were held. This school also opened an alternative high school (to move low performing students from the traditional high school's testing roster). All of this occurred within a two year time span.

Cautious Follower Approach

Included in the NLCB legislation was a call to develop scientifically based research that is proven to be effective. The results of these proven studies are housed

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at a United States Department of Education website titled What Works Clearing House. Unfortunately, only three studies have been approved for inclusion in this data base for academic achievement (USDOE, 2011). The three studies deal with character and thus do not provide guidance for high school principals implementing changes to their entire school. Subject area research is primarily limited to specific commercial programs. Mathematics has 32 studies that have been approved for inclusion. Only two programs are related to high school mathematics with both having a negative improvement index. Out of the 24 studies for reading and writing, not one is focused on high school students. High school principals faced with a mandate to improve student achievement are left to themselves to identify what they believe is the best solution for their school. In this study it is evident that high school principals are observing what their peers do and picking which practices they believe show the most promise.

In analyzing the interview transcripts, there emerged, alongside evidence of rapid but uncertain actions, a sense of principals waiting to watch what other schools did first and then react based on perceived success. It should be pointed out that lacking specific research indicating best practices (Scott, Kober, Rentner and Jennings, 2004; USDOE, 2011) principals are acting from their perceptions of successful programs despite changes or elimination of the original programs they might be emulating. It was very much a "you go first and if I like it I may try it" approach. A stand-out example of a 'followership' approach came from a principal discussing personal curriculum. Personal curriculum is the vehicle that the Michigan Department of Education developed for students who want or need to deviate from state mandated courses. While implementing personal curriculum was a concern for this principal, his strategy was

"First I have to see what policy or procedure that [a neighboring principal] has". This principal has no intention of developing a plan for implementing personal curriculums. Instead, he is waiting for a higher performing school to develop its plan and then he will seek to emulate it.

In another example highlighting both the followership approach and perceived success despite changes in the original program(s), a principal from one of the top performing schools in the county adopted strategies learned from three other principals to address his concerns with remaining a top achieving school in the county. Despite the fact his school out-performed these other schools, after observing these changes for a year he perceived that these other schools implemented changes in regards to the Michigan Merit Curriculum that would benefit his school. His school implemented an algebra "shadow class" (a class that provides additional support for algebra class) modeled on one used at a nearby high school, a freshman support class modeled on that of another high school, and a MME test preparation class modeled on a class in a third school. At the same time, this principal chose to hold the algebra shadow class after school, even though a required after-school math support class was found to be ineffective by another school in the county. This lack of opportunity for systemic learning in the county forces building leaders to repeat mistakes rather than learning from others' mistakes.

Not-Very-Effective Approaches

Three key themes emerge from a review of the data. Principals in this study relied heavily on structural changes. While the actions taken by these principals in response to their concerns with current school accountability measures was coded into

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categories indicating the target of those actions, the actions themselves predominately failed to address the underlying issue of improved instruction. This is consistent with research by Larry Cuban (1984) and Richard Elmore (1996) highlighting the propensity of school leaders to utilize structural changes instead of getting at deeper issues. The second theme that emerged was a lack of systemic long-term planning. Participants in this study did not cite plans for the multiple actions they took. The implication of this finding is that high school principals in Genesee County are not using the school improvement plans required under Michigan law to guide the actions they took. Actions are being taken in a piecemeal fashion rather than being part of a cohesive plan for improvement. The final major theme that emerged was uncertainty concerning the effectiveness of the actions taken. Given the paucity of research on effective high school instruction, principals in this study utilized their own judgment concerning actions being taken by neighboring districts. Principals in this study implemented programs they deemed successful in neighboring districts despite fully understanding the long-term effectiveness of the programs in the school that originally implemented the program.

The discussion concerning uncertainty and both the speed of change and the use of a cautious followership approach furthers my claim that these building leaders are acting without a systemic plan for improvement, as a direct result of not having a diagnostic sense of what the underlying problem is. If Genesee County high school principals had a firm grasp on the real problems, I would expect to see a resolve for some core programs and strategies. When the top performing schools in the county initiate fundamental changes in their approach to helping lower achieving students that

parallels approaches used by some of the lower achieving schools, it is clear that no one has a firm grasp on how best to help all students.

Illustrative Case #1: Trimester Scheduling: An Illustrative Case of Key Themes

One of the most common changes driven by new state accountability policies was a move to trimester scheduling as a means of coping with the MMC standards. Three out of the 13 principals in the study had already implemented trimesters in their buildings. Four additional building leaders were looking into trimesters, with two of them attempting to implement some aspects of trimesters into their traditional schedule.

Under the trimester system, the school year was divided into three sections instead of the typical two semesters. Schools on trimesters offer five periods a day instead of six, thus offsetting the loss in number of days by increasing the daily time allocated to each course. A student who attends a school on semesters has 12 opportunities to schedule classes (2x6), whereas a student who attends a school on trimesters has 15 (3x5).

One advantage of this schedule is that it allows a student who fails the first part of a course to retake this part during the second trimester and still complete the course in a given academic year. It also allows some courses to be spread over the entire school year, thus gaining additional instructional time. Within increased scheduling opportunities, two of the three schools in this study utilizing trimesters developed an ACT preparation class that is required for all students in a certain grade. A disadvantage of this structure is that many teachers believe that all the core courses need to be taught for the entire school year (3 trimesters). It also creates the situation

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where some students will take the first part of a course in the fall, not have it during the winter, and finish the course in the spring.

This approach to dealing with problems is, however, emblematic of many responses:

(a) This structural change was made even though there was not a strong research base supporting it. Very little empirical research has been conducted on the consequences of alternative schedules (McCreary & Hausman, 2001). Structural changes alone have weak potential to impact student learning (Newmann & Wehlage, 1996). Richard Elmore, citing Larry Cubban's work concludes "we've become very good at changing the overarching structure of the education system without really changing anything." (Johnson & Blair, 1999, p. 1). Despite the weak basis in research, principals in Genesee County are pursuing trimester scheduling as a solution to their concerns.

(b) This study did not produce data that showed that a transition to the trimester system took place to address a substantive issue surrounding instruction. The limited research on alternative scheduling concludes that the outcome depends on how teachers make use of the schedule change (McCreary & Hausman, 2001). In this study, principals did not discuss any comprehensive plans for improvement coupled with the schedule change. Instead, the transition allowed for easily accommodating the Michigan Merit Curriculum along with traditional electives such as band and foreign language. The increased scheduling opportunities frequently come at the expense of instructional time, approximately 23 hours in core classes. As a result, the ability to maintain electives – one of the major goals of a trimester schedule is offset by the need to provide mandatory support classes and test preparation classes.

(c) Actions taken were often modeled after actions happening in other county schools. In this instance, building leaders see the immediate benefits of the change, i.e., remediation of failing students, inclusion of support classes taken concurrently with core classes, and requirement of ACT preparation classes, without a thorough understanding about the effectiveness of these strategies. The changes enacted focus on changing the structure of the courses, not necessarily the content and delivery. Previously, I discussed the cautious approach being utilized by high school principals in Genesee County. It should be noted, however, that while two or three schools in this study have delved further into trimesters, most of the remaining schools took a more cautious approach and implemented, to the extent possible, some of the trimester strategies in their buildings.

Illustrative Case #2: Little Leveraging of New Instructional Technologies

It is somewhat surprising that despite the rise in online education and blended instruction – containing both a traditional seat time component and an online component – observed nationally at the post secondary level, this study revealed only one innovation of this sort that targeted a small group of students. Where technology applications were noted, it predominately centered on credit recovery and test preparation applications. Although the question was not specifically asked, 6 of the 13 principals interviewed mentioned that they are using some form of online education with their students. How this service is provided ranges from allowing students to complete courses entirely from home to assigning an online course within the school day, which students complete in a supervised computer lab.

When technology was discussed further, the focus of the interviews was on credit recovery, not student learning. Some principals felt that the online content is easier than the analogous courses offered in their schools. One principal is using an online provider, *Plato*, for students to progress in mathematics to such an extent that he is referring to it as "Math Plato." For these principals, online courses are a way to meet the requirements of the Michigan Merit Curriculum but perhaps not the spirit, which is increased student learning. This is not surprising since credit recovery has become somewhat problematic during the NCLB era. Building leaders can no longer offer an after-school or summer school generic course, i.e., summer school math, to students who have fallen behind. Instead, students now need the specific courses, i.e. Algebra I and Algebra II, required by the Michigan Merit Curriculum and taught by a highly qualified teacher. The aforementioned generic math credit will no longer "count" toward graduation.

Several building leaders mentioned using on-line test preparation programs to get students better prepared for the Michigan Merit Exam. Since the ACT is a major component of the test, numerous on-line opportunities exist to help students prepare. In many instances, students are taking multiple practice ACT tests prior to taking the one that counts.

Genesee County high schools remain unchanged despite new technologies which could be blended into their current structure to enhance the learning of students. Genesee County principals' use of technology as a structural change is likely the combined result of not having a comprehensive plan for technology use and instead relying on replication of programs in neighboring school districts.

(a) Technology innovations are being used primarily as a structural change. Online course are being used instead of teacher led courses. The implication is that students who failed a class the first time can earn credit on their own without the assistance of a teacher at their school. Blended instruction was only mentioned by one principal in this study. Principals in this study are not seeking to utilize online instruction to supplement classroom instruction taking place in their building.

(b) Principals in this study did not cite comprehensive plans for utilizing technology to address instructional issues. Instead, technology is being used at best to sporadically address concerns with credit recovery and at worst to circumnavigate issues of having a highly qualified teacher. High school principals in Genesee County would be well served to develop plans for the effective integration of technology within their buildings.

(c) Of the online course providers mentioned in this study, Plato was the provider of choice for five of the six Genesee County high school principals utilizing online instruction. This is in large part due to the fact that Plato offers the cheapest course of any online provider (Gen-Net personal communication, 2009). While the What Works Clearinghouse does not have a study addressing Plato's high school content it does have one focusing on middle school. The study analyzing the effectiveness of Plato's middle school math program indicates a negative improvement index (USDOE, 2011). Despite the lack of research showing the effectiveness of the Plato program, high school principals in this study continue to utilize it for credit recovery.

(d) Absent research pointing principals in a different direction, principals in this study are once again using a followership approach implementing online programs used

by other districts in the county. Besides Plato, only one other online provider was mentioned in this study: Apangea learning was being used by one building principal.

Conclusion

This study confirms that accountability policies are effective at provoking action from high school principals. Unfortunately, this study also shows that the actions taken by high school principals have not focused on increasing the quality of classroom instruction that high school students receive.

This study suggests that concerns of and actions taken by high school principals corresponded with policy elements that carried the highest stakes for their schools. AYP emerged as the policy with the greatest number of concerns from participants, followed by the MMC and MME. Taken together these three concerns also accounted for the most number of actions taken by building leaders in this study. A more detailed analysis of actions taken relative to AYP and Michigan School Report Card status revealed that schools obtaining an overall grade of "B" accounted for nearly twice as many actions as any other grade. This makes sense, given that the Michigan School Report Card Grade – while encompassing AYP, MME, and MMC – is not in and of itself something a principal can directly target without first impacting AYP, MME, or MMC. Accountability policies were effective at stimulating action in schools, but, ironically, they appear to stimulate as much action, if not more, in schools with lower risks and perceived pressures. It appears that the pressure of state sanctions is less relevant than community or internal school pressure to maintain a Michigan School Report Card Grade of a B or better.

The actions taken by building leaders in this study centered on organization structure and management, course and curriculum change, and instructional development and targeting. Within the original construct of the data analysis principals in schools earning the lowest Michigan School Report Card grades focused their action on issues of organization structure and management. Principals in higher performing schools, on the other hand, focused their actions more heavily on course and curriculum changes. Further data analysis revealed three key findings:

1. The vast majority of all actions taken in this study could be classified as structural changes because they fail to get at the essence of improved teaching or learning. It is clear that principals in this study are not acting from a deep diagnostic knowledge of the problem.

2. Principals in this study are utilizing a piecemeal approach to implement change in their buildings, as opposed to a long-term systemic plan. Despite Michigan law requiring school improvement plans, principals in this study are not utilizing them to drive the changes they are implementing.

3. Principals are uncertain about the effectiveness of the actions they are taking. This is observed in both the strong reliance on adopting programs or taking actions that are occurring in neighboring schools as well as the speed in which programs are implemented and eliminated.

As noted in Chapter 1, a gap exists in current research concerning the effects of school accountability policy. Existing research either deals with large state-level data sets or is small case studies of individual schools. This study highlights the effect of federal and state school accountability policy on a County- wide scale. While the study

confirms that policy is effective at prompting action from high school principals, it also identified policy conditions that are causing the most action from building principals.

Implications for Accountability Policy

Current accountability measures, while intended to increase student knowledge, have not been designed to drive an increase in knowledge concerning the development of new systems, approaches, and capabilities for educating high school students. This study highlighted both the lack of deep diagnostic understanding for lack of student learning and a lack of actions centered on teacher development. This lack of diagnostic understanding was universal among the group of 13 principals. Future accountability policies must call for the development of a quality data management system to readily identify specific areas of weakness for students. Once principals understand specific deficiencies in student learning, they can work to improve teachers' skills to address the problem.

This study pointed out a specific set of circumstances that resulted in nearly twice as many actions being taken. Having a Michigan School Report Card Grade of a "B" prompted more action than any other, even though the principals acknowledged that the goal of 100% proficiency was unobtainable. As mentioned previously, the combined effect of community expectations and school expectations is likely a motivating factor for these principals. Policy should seek to better understand these circumstances prompting action in some schools. Ideally, policy could be changed to engage these same factors in schools at the lower end of student achievement. One option would be to create separate grading scales for schools with multiple subgroups. Instead of having a system that places the lowest performing schools on the same scale as the highest,

policy could place the lower performing schools together. By creating a pool of similar low performing schools together and adjusting the grading criteria, it may be possible to increase the number of improvement strategies a school implements and thus its overall change for success.

Implications for School Leaders

This study indicated that high school principals lack a diagnostic sense of why their students are not learning at the level they desire. The general implication of this study's research is that building leaders have not clearly defined the problem(s) they have. It is apparent that high school principals, at least in this study, believe the main issue is making AYP, not improving student learning. Using this lens, their decisions to focus on courses, testing, and organizational issues makes more sense. If building leaders clearly stated that their problems were student achievement in the areas of reading and mathematics, we would see a different set of actions.

Change by school leaders needs to be purposeful. High school principals need to have a clear plan addressing both the short- and long-term actions they are taking to address their concerns. To a much greater extent than observed in this study, building leaders need to implement changes for longer periods of time and to truly evaluate the effectiveness of all changes. Only after these two approaches are taken will high school principals begin to build a knowledge base of not only the most effective approaches but also the underlying reasons for success or failure of programs.

It is evident in this study that while the participating principals are educated, well intending individuals, they are universally lacking in either the skill set or desire to use certain strategies. The universal exclusion of systemic plans for change in this study is

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disturbing. Equally troubling is the lack of opportunities for schools to learn from the successes or mistakes of one another. Principals, for the most part, are not being pressured by their communities to take actions to improve student learning. This is consistent with the 2010 Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll showing that 77% of people give the school their child attends an A or B compared to 18% for public schools as a whole (Bushaw & Lopez, 2010). Principals in this study estimated that 44% of time the community is uninformed about the actions the principals are taking. Participants estimated that 14% of the time the community was opposed to the actions taken, while only 13% of the time the community supported the actions they were taking. Taken together the data point out that the communities that hired these principals are happy with their local schools. Aside from the specific circumstance noted previously, not only are communities not pressuring schools to change, but they also appear to be an obstacle to change based on their satisfaction with the status quo. Presumably the combined effect of rigorous federal and state policy mandating increased student performance, coupled with local communities' desire for not changing, has resulted in high turnover in the principalship. The University Council for Educational Administration (2008) found that the three-year turnover rate for high school principals was 60.7% and the five-year turnover rate was 76.4%.

Implications for Future Research

Broadly defined, the vast majority of actions taken by high school principals in this study can be classified as structural changes. Even actions coded as focusing on curriculum or instruction relied on changing what was taught instead of the deeper issue of how it is taught. This notion is consistent with the lack of approved research focusing

on high schools in the USDOE What Works Clearinghouse. Michigan will soon be poised to be a site for this research with the implantation of a tracking system for high school teachers' student results on the MME. With this data, effectiveness of teachers meeting the standards can be identified and research can seek to understand what they are doing in their classroom. One could either analyze lesson plans or have select teachers keep daily logs of how instructional time is used. The information for the most effective and least effective teachers, given similar school characteristics, could be compared to identify instructional practices having the most likelihood of success at the high school level. While this research may or may not meet the rigorous standards for inclusion in the What Works Clearinghouse, it is an important step forward for high school principals in Michigan. Once principals understand what is or is not effective, they can work with their teachers to produce more of the desirable strategies.

Another area for future research would include the analysis of school improvement plans. Despite the state law requiring school improvement plans, high school principals are not utilizing them to drive change in their buildings. A logical study would seek to understand both what is being included in these plans and how they are being used. This study indicates that while principals are presumably meeting the letter of the law, they are not effectively utilizing the required plans. Large policy implications exist. Once this relationship is better understood, the Department of Education and/or legislators could modify the existing requirements to ensure that high school principals are engaged in purposeful planning, both for the immediate future and for the long term.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Research Participant Information and Consent Form

Research Participant Information and Consent Form

You are being asked to participate in a research project. Researchers are required to provide a consent form to inform you about the study, to convey that participation is voluntary, to explain risks and benefits of participation, and to empower you to make an informed decision. You should feel free to ask the researchers any questions you may have.

Study Title: High school principals' decisions under NCLB
Researcher and Title: BetsAnn Smith, Associate Professor
Co researcher: Keith Smith, Principal Clio Area High School & Graduate Student MSU
Department and Institution: K-12 school administration, Michigan State University
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Keith Smith: 13144 Grant Cir. Clio, MI 48420, knsmith@admin.clio.k12.mi.us, or (810) 591-1358

1. PURPOSE OF RESEARCH:

You are being asked to participate in a research study of traditional high school principals in Genesee County Michigan. You have been selected as a possible participant in this study because of your employment as a traditional high school principal within Genesee County. From this study, the researchers hope to learn (1) the decisions high school principals have made in response NCLB and (2) the rationale and ramifications of those decisions. In the entire study, 23 people are being asked to participate. Your participation in this study will take about one hour.

2. WHAT YOU WILL DO:

You are being asked to participate in interview. The interview will consist of three main questions: What leadership decisions have you made in response to NCLB in the areas of curriculum, instructional strategies, assessment programs and data analysis, and school management? What are the ramifications of the decisions that you have made? Why did you make these decisions? Questions will be asked of you in each of the above mentioned areas. A series of pre-determined prompts will guide us through this interview. The interview, once completed, will be transcribed. The transcribed interview will be used to create data for the purpose of answering the research questions. You will be provided with the transcription of this interview. You will be asked to review the transcript for accuracy. Following the conclusion of the study, you will be provided a copy of the analysis of all the interviews.

3. POTENTIAL BENEFITS:

While the potential exists for you to benefit from taking part in this study through, gaining a better understanding of what high school's in the county as a whole are doing in response to NCLB. It is more likely, you will not directly benefit from your participation in this study. However, your participation in this study may contribute to the understanding of high school principals responses to NCLB, the ramifications of their decisions, and the justifications for their decisions.

4. POTENTIAL RISKS:

The potential risk of participating in this study are loss of anonymity. While there are several procedures in place to safeguard your identity from being disclosed it is not possible to absolutely guarantee anonymity. Participation in the study could lead to adverse affects on your employment and or reputation through the unintended release of information.

5. PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY:

Points to include:
The data collected for this research project will be kept confidential. Following the interview names will be removed and demographic information substituted. Analysis will not point out a particular school. Instead groups will be created based on criteria such as: like response, number of interventions, etc. Information about you will be kept confidential to the maximum extent allowable by law once the data analysis is complete, the data will be stored on a CD. The stored data will not contain readily verifiable information such as name and school district. The data will be kept for a period of seven years. The only individuals that will have access to the data are: the researchers involved in the study, the institutional review board at Michigan State as required by university policy or law, and anyone else who has legal authority to access this data that is considered confidential. Your specific interview data will not be shared with anyone affiliated with your school district.

You understand that as previously mentioned this interview will be recorded. The purpose of the recording is to generate data used in the analysis of the study. Upon transcription of the interview, the audio recording will be destroyed. The transcribed interview will not contain readily as a viable information such as name and school district.
    I agree to allow audiotaping/videotaping of the interview.
           ☐ Yes   ☐ No   Initials_____

6. YOUR RIGHTS TO PARTICIPATE, SAY NO, OR WITHDRAW

Participation in this research project is completely voluntary. You have the right to say no. You may change your mind at any time and withdraw. You may choose not to answer specific questions or to stop participating at any time.

7. COSTS AND COMPENSATION FOR BEING IN THE STUDY:

You will not incur any costs as a result of participating in the study. Nor will you receive any compensation for participation in the study.

8. CONTACT INFORMATION FOR QUESTIONS AND CONCERNS   *)*

If you have concerns or questions about this study, such as scientific issues, how to do any part of it, or to report an injury, please contact BetsAnn Smith, 409 Erickson Hall, East Lansing, MI 48824, bas@msu.edu, (517) 353-8646.

If you have questions or concerns about your role and rights as a research participant, would like to obtain information or offer input, or would like to register a complaint about this study, you may contact, anonymously if you wish, the Michigan State University's Human Research Protection Program at 517-355-2180, Fax 517-432-4503, or e-mail irb@msu.edu or regular mail at 202 Olds Hall, MSU, East Lansing, MI 48824.

9. DOCUMENTATION OF INFORMED CONSENT.

Your signature below means that you voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.

_____   _____
Signature   Date

You will be given a copy of this form to keep.

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interview Questions:

Part 1: Professional Profile, Demographic

- (Dl) How many years have you been employed, in any capacity, in a school setting?

- (D2) How many years have you been employed in school administration?

- (D3) How many years have you been employed at this school as a:
  Teacher _____
  AP _____
  Principal _____

Part 2: Most Pressing Performance and Accountability Concerns
I would like to establish a list of what you feel are the S most pressing performance and accountability matters you face.

Among all the state and federal performance demands and accountability measures you now confront, what issue concerns you the most- your top concern (i.e. what is your most pressing issue, where do you feel most challenged or vulnerable?)

- Can you think across other top issues of concern and share them with me. Our goal is to establish what you feel are your 5 top concerns where performance demands and accountability measures are concerned.

(Develop a list of their top 5 concerns)

Part 3. Response to Concerns
Now, I'd like to query you a bit about how you and the school have responded to these top concerns:

Concern #1 _____ _____

What measure drives this concern: NCLB? Edyes? MME? Combination? What decisions and actions have you taken in response to this concern?
- In taking these actions did you feel that you were making critical improvements
  or did you feel that you were forced to game the system?

Have these decisions and actions created conflicts in your school community? Have these decisions and actions conflicted with some of
  - Your beliefs as an educator
  - Your beliefs about what this community needs for its students

Concern #2 _____

- What measure drives this concern: NCLB? EdYes? MME? Combination
- What decisions and actions have you taken in response to this concern?
  - In taking these actions did you feel that you were making critical improvements or did you feel that you were forced to game the system?
  Have these decisions and actions created conflicts in your school community?
- Have these decisions and actions conflicted with some of
  - Your beliefs as an educator
  - Your beliefs about what this community needs for its students

Concern #3 _____

- What measure drives this concern: NCLB? EdYes? MME? Combination
- What decisions and actions have you taken in response to this concern?
  - In taking these actions did you feel that you were making critical improvements or did you feel that you were forced to game the system?
- Have these decisions and actions created conflicts in your school community?
- Have these decisions and actions conflicted with some of
  - Your beliefs as an educator
  - Your beliefs about what this community needs for its students

Concern #4 _____

- What measure drives this concern: NCLB? EdYes? MME? Combination
- What decisions and actions have you taken in response to this concern?
  - In taking these actions did you feel that you were making critical improvements or did you feel that you were forced to game the system?
- Have these decisions and actions created conflicts in your school community?
- Have these decisions and actions conflicted with some of
  - Your beliefs as an educator
  - Your beliefs about what this community needs for its students

Concern #5 _____

- What measure drives this concern: NCLB? EdYes? MME? Combination
- What decisions and actions have you taken in response to this concern?
    - In taking these actions did you feel that you were making critical improvements or did you feel that you were forced to game the system?
- Have these decisions and actions created conflicts in your school community?
- Have these decisions and actions conflicted with some of
    - Your beliefs as an educator
    - Your beliefs about what this community needs for its students

Part 4: Policy Clutter and Conflict

- In responding to the above concerns, have you run into conflicts between the various state and federal policies you have to respond to,
    - Are there winners and losers in these conflicts?

Part 5: Overall Reflections

- What do you think about the changes you are implementing, overall?

- Are there aspects to leading a high school under these conditions that you do not feel policy makers or other just do not understand?

    Is there anything that you have thought of that either you did not get a chance to say or I did not ask you about that you wish to have included?

Thank you very much for your time.

APPENDIX C

IRB APPROVAL

IRB# 08- 1074	PI BetsAnn Smith	TITLE High School Principals Decisions under NCLB: A Study of 23 County High Schools	REVIEW LEVEL EXPEDITED	RECENT APPROVAL 1/20/2009	EXPIRATION DATE 1/19/2010	STATUS Archived

IRB HISTORY

APP#	APPLICATION TYPE	DATE STARTED	DATE SUBMITTED	DATE APPROVED
i031865	INITIAL APPLICATION	11/4/2008	11/4/2008	1/20/2009
r032140	CLOSED	6/24/2010		

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