EDUCATIONAL TUG-OF-WAR:
PRINCIPAL LEADERSHIP AND ACCOUNTABILITY

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Educational Tug-of-War:
Principal Leadership and Accountability

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PROBLEM: As the United States Department of Education prepares to reauthorize ESEA once more, it does so in light of the reality that over 80% of schools will be considered in need of improvement by 2014 according to the adequate yearly progress targets (Duncan, 2011). Politicians, educators, and the general citizenry of the United States are concerned with how effective public schools are at educating our children; however, the current measurement of success is based heavily upon performance on high stakes assessments. Unfortunately, responding to NCLB demands are not the only things on the mind of school leaders. On any given day, there are a number of pressures that principals must consider in order to effectively manage the administrative and instructional aspects of running a school. Guided by the following research questions, this study explores how forces that are both internal and external to the principal influence the ways school leaders conceptualize and respond to accountability.

- To whom or what do principals feel most accountable?

- How do forces internal and external to the principal shape their conceptions of multiple sources of accountability?

- How does it happen differently in high and low performing schools?

- How does it happen differently in contexts that vary according to SES?

- How do principals' conceptions of accountability shape what they do to promote student achievement?

METHOD: This phenomenological collective case study collected data from 25 public middle school principals throughout New Jersey who lead schools that varied in socioeconomic and academic performance contexts. A pre-interview survey and follow up interview provided the basis for the data collection. The transcribed interviews were coded and analyzed according to the conceptual framework and research questions that guided the inquiry.

FINDINGS: Accountability to self is the most prominent source of accountability among the middle school principals in this study despite the prevalence of external accountability forces. When adding those who feel most accountable to teachers, it is apparent that most principals from higher achieving schools respond first to an internal accountability mechanism. Principals who identify an external source of accountability as most salient exhibit common attributes according to the school's improvement status, SES, and academic achievement.

SIGNIFICANCE: Although public and political attention is often focused on test-based accountability, there are other sources of accountability that receive less attention, especially as it relates to school leadership. This study adds to the research on the topic of educational accountability and leadership practices by exploring the concept from the perspective of a principal. As a result of the findings, the study also supports a better understanding of the perceptions of internal accountability among school leaders.

I dedicate this to those who inspire me to be the best I can be

Melanie, Alex, Olivia, and Xavier

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES

CHAPTER I

Introduction

The reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) in the last decade placed educational accountability in the spotlight with the passing of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB). As the United States Department of Education prepares to reauthorize ESEA once more (U. S. Department of Education, 2010), it does so in light of the reality that over 80% of schools will be considered in need of improvement by 2014 according to the adequate yearly progress (AYP) targets (Duncan, 2011). Politicians, educators, and the general citizenry of the United States are concerned with how our schools are educating our children; however, the current measurement of success is based heavily upon performance on high stakes state assessments which take place over the course of a few days during the school year.

According to the New Jersey's Consolidated State Performance report (2010) based upon 2008-2009 results, 1,503 (64.9%) out of 2,317 public schools met AYP leaving 814 (35.1%) schools falling short of the performance target. When further disaggregated, the data indicate that 818 (59.7%) out of 1370 public Title 1 schools met AYP and 552 (40.3%) did not. Furthermore, 657 (28.3%) of New Jersey schools did not make AYP for two or more years in a row and are designated as schools in need of improvement. Consequently, these schools now face sanctions that range from intra-

district school choice to restructuring schools through possible changes to academic programs, teachers, or administrators.

Unfortunately, responding to NCLB is not the only thing on the mind of school leaders as they attempt to educate their students. On any given day, there are numerous demands that public school principals must attend to in order to effectively manage the administrative and instructional affairs of a school. It is a game of educational tug-of-war with multiple ends to the rope pulling in different directions. Consider the following scenarios for a moment.

The state department of education just releases a public report that says that School XYZ missed the performance benchmark on a state assessment for the third year in a row because of the low performance of students with disabilities in the areas of language art literacy and mathematics. As a result, the school must now offer choice to its parents and allow them the option of sending their children to another local school. The district requires the principal to revamp the language arts curriculum for every grade in the school in order to address higher order thinking strategies. Furthermore, the local board of education and parent organization are each attempting to exert their influence to gain control over some of the decision-making about to take place. The principal at School XYZ feels pressure to comply with multiple demands from multiple sources.

Compare the above scenario with another school, School ABC, in the same district that met the state performance benchmarks and is not facing the imposition of any sanctions. The parents and board of education are generally pleased with the way the school is being run. In fact many parents from School XYZ are looking to send their children to ABC. Like its counterpart, School ABC must also begin implementation of

the new language arts curriculum. One task that lies before the principal is the search for a new seventh grade mathematics teacher who meets the federal highly qualified requirements. School ABC's principal is looking forward to finding someone who can help infuse more technology into the mathematics curriculum.

Here are two schools in the same district facing some of the same responsibilities while also having to respond to different types of accountabilities. How will the principals of each school respond to the various demands for accountability? Will they be different or the same? Why? Will each principal choose to focus attention on different things? If so, what's the difference? Why? To whom or what does each principal feel accountable? School leaders struggle to find answers to these and other similar questions each day as they attempt to provide the managerial and instructional leadership necessary to successfully support the educational goals of the school.

Historical Context of Accountability

Accountability has been a part of educational improvement efforts in the United States for quite some time. A broad historical review of education since the introduction of common schools in the 1800s shows how school leaders had been forced to respond to the multiple demands placed upon them from a variety of sources. In this perspective, legislation like NCLB can be seen as evolutionary more than it is revolutionary (McDonnell, 2005).

Early American school houses were generally run by school masters / principal teachers who had to attend to the curricular and management tasks of running the school. As school leaders, they had to teach, administer promotional exams, and discipline the

students while also having to interact with the parents, the local community, and school board (Blount, 1998). By the early 1900s, however, compulsory elementary education attendance laws and expanding high school enrollments increased the presence of principals in schools. They were formally charged with the administrative duties of supervising staff, interacting with parents and local officials, and responding to the societal demands of living in an era marked by economic difficulties and the scientific management movement. Many of these same job functions still exist today.

Towards the middle of the 20th century the political discourse centered on racial and gender equity which inevitably turned the national spotlight back on the schools. In her exploration of the evolution of the federal government's involvement in education, McDonnell (2005) described three distinct periods that characterizes the last 40 years. The first period began with the launching of the ESEA of 1965 by Lyndon B. Johnson. As one of the key initiatives in his War on Poverty, ESEA targeted support for disadvantaged students living in poor areas through Title I, a categorical program that provided funds to schools that needed it. In practice, the funds generally offered targeted assistance to students who were eligible through pull-out programs and services outside of the core instructional program of schools. Furthermore, due to the lack of governmental oversight, there was no consistent enforcement or accountability of the appropriate use of the funds to meet the policy's primary goal. Consequently, between 1965 and 1980, the original legislation was reauthorized four times in order to better target the needs of disadvantaged students (Peterson, Rabe, & Wong, 1991 cited in McDonnell, 2005). Public school principals quickly became accustomed to managing the bureaucratic demands for accountability.

The next period of evolution took place between 1980 and 1987. Coinciding with the release of the report, *A Nation at Risk*, the federal government pushed for higher standards; however, decreased Title I funds to support the effort. States responded by increasing their attention placed on graduation requirements, content standards, teacher certification, and assessment. It was at this time that principals were forced to make decisions about how to best make use of their scarce resources in order to keep up with societal emphasis placed on global competitiveness and excellence for all students. Pressure was mounting from local, state, and federal sources to respond while fiscal support waned.

The final phase began in 1988 with the reauthorization of ESEA that defined the academic expectations for Title I eligible students. In 1994, states were formally required, over a six year period, to align their content standards with a means to assess them through the Improving America's Schools Act (IASA) reauthorization of ESEA. McDonnell (2005) stresses that receipt of Title I funds entailed submitting specific plans that detailed the use of the funds and that "states were required to hold schools and districts accountable to make adequate progress toward achieving the standards and they were to identify districts and schools in need of improvement to take corrective action in cases of persistent academic failure" (p. 30). IASA focused its attention on maintaining educational excellence for all students by promoting a coordinated use of all categorical funds in order to realize the greatest systemic reform (U. S. Department of Education, 1996). Therefore, Title I eligible students were expected to meet the same academic standards as their peers which redirected attention back in the general education classroom rather than pulling students out for services. With the most recent

reauthorization in 2001, NCLB continued to intensify the federal and state governments'

focus on standards, assessments, and sub-group performance outcomes with explicit

performance targets, timelines, and sanctions to be imposed when applicable. Through

NCLB principals became held increasingly more accountable to meet the diverse needs

of disparate constituent groups.

A historical overview of the American educational system reveals that school

leaders have always had to respond to a multiple sources of accountability in a variety of

forms. In fact, the federal requirements such as those imposed by NCLB are relatively

recent developments that were added to the already full load of responsibilities that

principals must shoulder. Consequently, they are now faced with the daunting challenge

achieving excellence in education for all students by the year 2014 while attending to all

of the other demands associated with being the instructional leader of the school.

Research Overview

Along with meeting federal accountability requirements, principals must also

figure out how to balance the demands from other sources as well. Internal and external

variables shape the experience for each school leader making no two situations exactly

alike. As a result, they have to have to carefully navigate their circumstances while

carrying out their daily leadership responsibilities. The current study offers a better

understanding of school leadership in an era of increased multiple accountabilities from a

principal's perspective.

This exploration of educational leadership and accountability is organized as

follows. It begins with the description of a conceptual framework and research questions

that articulate the precise phenomenon under study into a format that facilitates a review

of relevant literature as well as defining the elements of the current inquiry. Next, an

examination of relevant research provides a scholarly context for how the concepts have

been studied thus far and where additional exploration can expand the knowledge base.

Then an explanation of a research design connects the conceptual framework to an actual

research context. Once the conceptual and methodological stage is set the results offer

direct insight into the minds of school leaders regarding the concepts under study. The

explorations concludes with a discussion of the findings and their impact on educational

administration research and practice.

Conceptual Framework

To get started, a conceptual framework (Figure 1) was developed to represent

how leadership practices are influenced by, among other things, the pressure for

accountability.
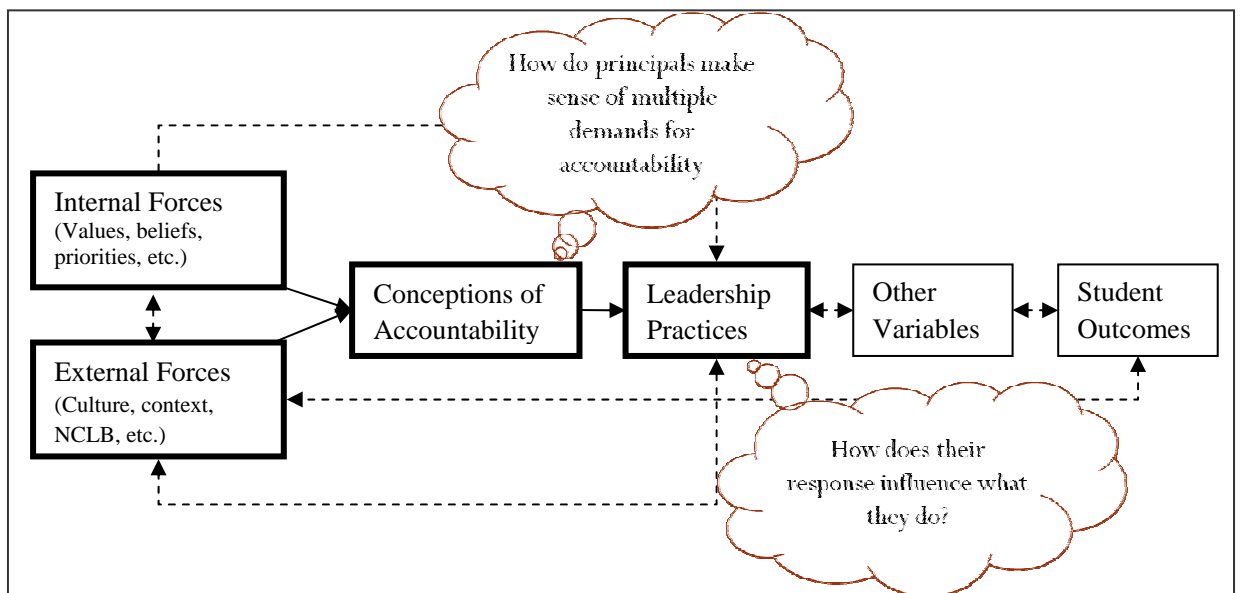
Figure 1. Conceptual framework highlighting the interaction between the forces
influencing a principal's conceptions of accountability and their leadership practices

Put simply, the framework in Figure 1 suggests that a variety of internal and external forces shape school principals' conceptions of accountability. Those forces may include a principal's internal values and beliefs as well as external sources of pressure from the state, district, or local level. At times the forces are in conflict with one another and can create the feeling of being pulled in different directions as in the game of tug-of-war. These combined forces ultimately impact the principal's conceptions of the multiple sources of accountability which influence the priority and legitimacy ascribed to them as well. Based upon these conceptions, leaders respond with practices which indirectly affect student outcomes when mediated by other variables (Hallinger & Heck, 1996). Figure 1 also suggests that there are other potential interactions that exist between different aspects of the diagram such as the potential influence of external forces on student outcomes; however, the present endeavor elucidates the conceptual framework with a focus on the first four boxes while still acknowledging the existence of the rest. Through the use of qualitative methodologies, this study explores how principals lead schools while managing the demands presented by the demands of multiple accountabilities.

To understand school leadership practices in the presence of multiple accountabilities, the following research questions guide the exploration of the literature, design of the study, and analysis and presentations of the results:

- To whom or what do principals feel most accountable?

- How do forces internal and external to the principal shape their conceptions of multiple sources of accountability?

- How does it happen differently in high and low performing schools?

- How does it happen differently in contexts that vary according to SES?

- How do principals' conceptions of accountability shape what they do to promote student achievement?

A simple search for the term 'accountability' using EBCSOhost, an on-line research database, reveals an increase in its popularity in the academic literature since the inception of NCLB. When searching for articles with a publication date of December 2001 or earlier, the database yields almost 3000 scholarly journal articles; whereas, the same search from January 2002 to the present yields close to 9000 articles. The following literature review of the scholarly research will focus on the subject of principal leadership and accountability and examine the three major aspects of the theoretical model: 1) what factors influence the conceptualization of accountability, 2) how school leaders conceptualize accountability as a result of 1, and 3) how do items 1 and 2 influence the practices of school leaders.

CHAPTER II

Review of the Literature

Principals are pulled in many different directions as calls for accountability come from many different sources. School leaders attempt to meet the expectations set for them based upon a host of internal and external variables that potentially influence their perceptions and practices. To best understand how principals understand accountability, the next section explores the following areas of research: defining accountability as a concept in education, influential internal and external forces, how school leaders conceptualize accountability, and leadership practices in response to demands for accountability.

Educational Accountability

Although accountability has become such a common part of the political and academic discourse surrounding the topic of school reform it seems that a common understanding of the concept is not always easy to find. Through Blacker's (2003) liberal contexualist perspective the concept becomes increasingly more obscure as educational policy focuses more and more attention on accountability; therefore, he offers a framework that is based upon the diversity of educator's values and commitments. Among policy makers and practitioners, the term accountability is often used interchangeably with other aspects of instruments for school reform that attempt to build capacity and spur school improvement

(McDonnell and Elmore, 1987). As a result, standardized test scores, school improvement plans, school funding formulas, educational reform, or performance-based reform are artifacts of accountability systems that are often treated as though they represent the system itself (McDonnell and Elmore, 1987; Blacker, 2003; Leithwood at al., 2002; Mintrop et al., 2001). The first step in the exploration of accountability and school leadership is to understand the various definitions in an educational setting.

In the academic literature on the topic, understanding accountability is often organized along different dimensions. Typologies categorize accountability based upon the source of the pressure, external or internal (Newman et al., 1997; Abelman et al., 1999; Kelly, 1999, Watson & Supovitz, 2001; Firestone and Shipps, 2005; Shipps and White, 2009). In other instances, it is divided into formal and informal types (Ableman et al., 1999). Accountability is also organized based upon the leader's approach to the concept (Leithwood, 2001). According to Adams and Kirst (1999), accountability systems can be described based upon a variety of attributes such as the nature of the expectations, the accountability mechanism, incentive, and relationship between those of whom performance is expected (agents) and those to who accountability is owed (principals). The current exploration posits that, in practice, educational accountability does not always fall into a single category rather it is composed of multiple dimensions that exist simultaneously to influence principals' work. The following discussion focuses on the external and internal *sources* of accountability.

External Accountability

The predominant application of the concept in an educational setting generally refers to the external sources of accountability. The principal/agent distinction suggested by Adams and Kirst (1999) offers a clear understanding of external accountability in education. Simply put, the principals are the sources of accountability pressure that exist outside of the school or individual and set expectations, and the agents are the educators who feel the pressure to perform. Newmann, King, and Rigdon (1997) elaborate further and suggest that it "reflects a relationship between a steward or provider of a good or service and a patron or agent with the power to reward, punish or replace the provider" (p.43). In education, the most common sources of external accountability are:

> electorates, politicians (legislators, governors, mayors); educational politicians (chief state school officers, state boards of education, school boards); judges; bureaucrats; business and professional associations; interest groups; textbook and test publishers; educational administrators; teachers; and parents. (Adams and Kirst, 1999, p.474)

Calls for accountability can include standardized test mandates imposed by state or federal legislation such as NCLB or pressures exerted by parents in making decisions about the management of the school. According to Adams and Kirst (1999) the context of the interaction amplifies the complex possibilities so that school leaders (principals) can require their teachers (agents) to implement a particular instructional initiative in the classroom that district leaders (principals) impose upon the schools leaders (agents). External accountability can also defined by how the agents report back to the principals.

Attached to external accountabilities are reporting mechanisms to the principals by the agents which offer an explanation of what they have done (Abelman et al., 1999; Lashway, 2001; Ladd & Zelli, 2002; Newman et al., 1997; Firestone & Shipps, 2005; Mintrop, 2004; Popham, 2004). The mechanisms may vary in both content and format.

For instance, federal and state accountability measures use formal results from high-stakes tests as one of the most prominent means of reporting to constituent groups. However, within a school principals may use official handbooks and teacher lesson plans as additional forms of accountability reporting (Abelman et al., 1999). The ability to influence behavior does not come from reporting alone; rather, the consequences or incentives attached to the performance are intended to move people to act in a desirable manner (Sheldon & Biddle, 1998; Ladd, 2004).

Contemporary definitions of external accountability make consequences an inevitable outgrowth of the reporting process (Diamond & Spillane, 2004; Goertz and Duffy, 2001; Newman et al., 1997; O'Day, 2002; Ladd & Zelli, 2002; Mintrop, 2004; Darling-Hammond, 2004; Anderson, 2005; Firestone & Shipps, 2005). NCLB places specific sanctions on schools identified as 'In need of improvement' after they fail to meet performance expectations. The corrective measures range from offering parents intra-district school choice to replacing staff and restructuring the school. In a test-based accountability system, according to Firestone and Schorr (2004), "the theory of action… is that the formal sanction linked to meeting standards motivate educators and students to learn what is tested" (p. 6). On the school level, formal evaluations, contract renewals, and salary increments are used as incentives for getting teachers to comply with the expectations of their job. Conversely, and much less frequently in external accountability systems, rewards are sometimes used to encourage positive performance or compliant behaviors (Kelly & Odden, 1995 cited in Newmann et al., 1997; Ladd and Zelli, 2002).

Internal Accountability

Internal accountability is a much less researched aspect of accountability. This source of accountability refers an internal compunction or liability of individuals to behave in a certain way (Firestone and Shipps, 2005). Abelman and his colleagues (1999) referred to the same idea as responsibility. They state,

> the distinguishing characteristic… is that it is personal and individual in nature and it stems from the values and beliefs of individuals… from the life experiences and moral background of the individuals, from their education and training, from their beliefs about the social determinants of student learning, and from their interaction with others (p. 3).

In some schools, internal accountability is collectively generated based upon shared norms and beliefs about student performance and learning (Newman et al., 1997; Abelman et al., 1999). Firestone and Schorr (2004) suggest that internal accountability is more a part of the local culture than it is a formal set of standards, measures, and sanctions. Therefore, the mechanisms by which internal accountability is enacted may come from the pressure to act by one's peers or their own conscience (Newman et al., 1997, Watson & Supovitz, 2001; Firestone and Schorr, 2004; Firestone and Shipps, 2005). Unlike its conceptual counterpart, internal accountability is not directly reported or explicitly measured, nor are there imposed consequences or sanction. The key to understanding this type of accountability is less in the principal-agent relationship and more in the source of the motivation. Internal accountability relies on the motivation that resides within the individual to act in a way that is morally or professionally aligned to a personal or shared values and beliefs.

In general, internal and external accountability differ based upon the source of the liability or pressure to change behaviors or meet expectations; however, these sources do not exist in isolation. Invariably, educators will encounter external accountability mechanisms while also managing their own feelings of internal accountability. "In some schools, strong internal accountability was accompanied by compatible external accountability, but in other, internal accountability existed without or even in opposition to external accountability requirements" (Newmann et al., 1997, p.48). As a result, successful attainment of the organization's goal is more likely when the two types are in alignment and at risk when they are in conflict. Similarly, the final outcomes of competing accountabilities are also influenced by other forces that are internal and external to the individual. This line of inquiry still remains relatively unexplored, but an important avenue for future research nevertheless (Adams and Kirst, 1999; Firestone and Shipps, 2005).

Influential Forces

In addition to internal and external sources of accountability that place demands on principals, other forces are at work that may influence the accountability perceptions and behaviors of school leaders. Similar to the sources of accountability just described, these forces can reside within the individual as values and beliefs or exist outside as contextual factors. The strength of these forces is different for each situation and school leader; therefore, the power to influence principals also varies.

Internal forces

Principals assume school leadership roles with preexisting values and beliefs that shape how they view and operate in the world (Hoy & Miskell, 2001). They possess specific beliefs about their role in support of teaching and learning and how they interact with students, teachers, administrators, parents, and the community. Their values define who they are and what they do to be successful within the organization. When something enters their environment, principals attempt to make sense of it by incorporating it into their current values and beliefs system. They must either assimilate the information or reconcile differences between what they know and what they perceive; therefore, individuals continuously construct meaning of accountability in their lives with each new experience.

School leaders use their values and beliefs to make sense of the accountability policies and pressures they feel everyday. Drawing upon research in human motivation Leithwood, Steinbach, and Jantzi (2002) contend that educator's judge policies based upon the desirability of perceived policy outcomes. Consequently, a policy will be accepted or rejected based upon the meaningfulness of the outcomes. If it is believed to be meaningful and aligned to principals' values and beliefs, then compliance is likely. The research on motivations also suggests that when the goals of a program are not consistent with the goals of the organization then the motivational power of an accountability effort will be diluted (Kelley et al., 2001). Consequently, tension and cognitive dissonance diminish the school leaders' desire to implement or comply with the reform.

Similarly, principals' capacity, beliefs about efficacy, confidence, and self esteem, impact whether school leaders believe that they are capable of meeting the outcomes of the accountability policy (Kelly et al., 2002). Bulkley, Fairman, & Martinez (2004) suggest that districts' are heavily influenced by their will and capacity to support more general reform efforts. They conclude that "in any income category, the variation in administrators' will and capacity… and teachers' will and capacity are key to the problem of driving change through testing and standards" (p.140). The capacity to implement reforms comes from the interaction of various forms of capital within an educational organization–human, social, physical capital–in addition to contextual factors such as district size and organization and governance (Marsh, 2002).

In the midst of competing interests and accountabilities, school leaders are also driven by their perceived self-efficacy. According Bandura (1997), "unless people believe they can produce desired effects by their actions they have little incentive to act. Efficacy belief is, therefore, the foundation of action" (p. 52). Bandura's research in social cognitive theory suggests that beliefs about competencies are linked to specific domains of functioning; therefore, global measures are less valuable in predicting motivation or action. Furthermore, Bandura posits that efficacy beliefs can be enhanced through 1) mastery experiences, 2) social modeling, 3) social persuasion, and 4) physical and emotion states. Building upon Bandura's work, Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2004, 2007) developed a quantitative measure to assess principals' sense of efficacy. The principal sense of efficacy scale (PSES) examined efficacy beliefs about instruction, management, and moral leadership. In general, the results of their study revealed that professional preparation and district and school-level support were more likely to predict

efficacy beliefs than contextual or demographic variables. Despite their findings, even the authors admit that principal self-efficacy remains a promising, yet largely unexplored concept.

In the context of NCLB, the incentive mechanisms that place labels upon schools as successes or failures influence the self-perceptions of educators and students alike. In Brown and Clift's (2010) study of the incentive effects of the AYP requirements, they found evidence to support qualitative differences among schools of different achievement levels. Using a metaphor from physics, the "basin of attraction" is used to describe how AYP targets are meaningful incentives among those who are most directly impacted by the law and incorporate it into their everyday actions. Those who are above or below the basin are not motivated by the legislation because "these groups will gain nothing by changing their behavior, since they either are never going to be good enough or are already good enough" (p. 776). As a result, the perceptions of school leaders are susceptible to the influence of the external forces around them.

External Forces

External forces exist outside of the agent and potentially exert influence over principals' accountability perceptions and leadership actions. In some cases, specific constituents or policies place demands directly on principals to meet their performance expectations. In other situations, the external forces are indirect, but powerful and ever-present factors in the work of school leaders. School cultures and the contexts play a major role in how principals perceive and interact with the world around them.

As with the values and beliefs of the individual, the preexisting culture of an organization can greatly influence the view of accountability reforms (Marsh, 2002; Watson and Supovitz, 2001). For instance, a newly introduced reform initiative cannot simply replace a culture that is already in place with new values and behaviors; instead the environment may adapt to become a hybrid of the original culture and the proposed reform measure. What results may or may not include all of the essential elements that are intended by the reform. The recipients of the reform, teachers and administrators, then judge it based on the amalgamated version rather than its originally intended form (Watson and Supovitz, 2001). An organization's bad past experiences with other ill managed efforts may add to the belief about the value or effectiveness of the accountability reform (Leithwood et al., 2002). The reconciling of new and old cultural rules, values, norms, behaviors, and experiences is just one layer of processing that takes place when something new is introduced into the system. Other contextual forces can have an impact on the understanding of accountability systems.

The context that principals find themselves also can influence their understanding of accountability. In their investigation of how mid-level managers make sense of accountability policies, Spillane and his colleagues (2002) discuss how their interpretations are situated in multiple overlapping contexts. Consequently, their understanding of accountability is a result of where they are in the reform process, their status as intermediaries between staff, students, and higher level administrators and their different belief, histories, and agendas. On the other hand, Diamond and Spillane (2004) argue, the interpretation of accountability and tests depends on the school performance context which is often reflective of SES.

> Some of the key mechanisms through which high stakes accountability is supposed to impact students' educational opportunities are constructed very differently depending on the school's status in relation to the accountability system. This is very important because students' race and social class correlate with school accountability status. (p. 1170).

Therefore, a principal who is forced to contend with the sanctions of being identified as a school in need of improvement may be more likely to adopt the characteristics of an accountability culture and become focused on immediate results. Conversely, a high performing school that is not required to respond to the negative demands of a reform may have the luxury of being able to be more focused on the core values of an organizational learning culture. This is also reflected in the basin of attraction metaphor used by Brown and Clift (2010) to describe the unequal effects of AYP.

Other studies of test-based accountability systems suggest similar differences between teachers in high and low SES schools. Monfils and her colleagues (2004) examined the instructional impacts of testing and the equity issues that may arise. Their analysis revealed that teachers in lower SES districts reported more instructional changes in their response than higher SES schools. In some ways, the teachers in lower SES schools responses were aligned to the instructional expectations of the test while in other ways the instruction became "decontextualized test preparation through the use of commercial test prep materials, teaching test-besting skills or holding practice sessions" (p.61). McNeil's study of the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (McNeil and Valenzuela, 2001; McNeil, 2005) also suggest similar consequences of such accountability systems on disadvantaged minority youth. The results of these differences are underscored by the widening achievement gap between the poor and wealthy school districts.

The internal values and beliefs together with the context-specific forces outside of the agent provide the filters through with school leaders view accountability. The infinite combinations of internal and external forces create endless possibilities for how principals perceive and respond to accountability.

Conceptions of Accountability

In many ways accountability can be compared to the game of telephone in which a message is passed on and slightly altered from one person to the next. As accountabilities are subject to similar processes of knowledge acquisition and distribution, the meaning gets subtly altered until it reaches the end where the final interpretation does not exactly match the original conception. The meaning of information can be easily altered at any point in the transmission process by who delivers the message, how it is delivered, and who receives it. Firestone and Shipps (2005) contend, "Moreover, the interpretation process provides considerable opportunity for the nonrational aspects of collective sense making to emerge" (p. 93). At the intersection of internal and external forces at work in the lives of principals' lay the conceptualization of the multiple accountabilities that they face every day. What results are several possible opportunities for interpretation, conflict, and alignment.

As indicated by Diamond and Spillane's (2004) research on high-stakes accountability in urban elementary schools, responses to accountability can vary according to the focus of school leaders. In some instances the response may be narrowly focused on a specific task such as raising test scores or getting out of improvement status while other situations may reveal a more global focus to addressing a problem such as

improving overall teaching and learning. Similarly, the conceptualization may vary according to the individual's orientation to time. In other words, the interpretation of accountability may depend on whether or not the individual is more interested in short term gains or long term solutions.

Another possible dimension for interpretation is the perceived alignment of multiple existing accountabilities with one another and with one's one values and beliefs (Kelley et al., 2001; Leithwood et al., 2002). When the goals and objectives are similar in their intent, then it becomes easier for school leaders to manage the varying expectations and responsibilities such as when the different sources of pressure are all focused on instruction. Problems arise, however, when accountabilities are not in alignment or conflict in some cases and school leaders seek out ways to resolve the tension. In her discussion of district responses to state policies, Marsh (2002) found that "they often ignored, adapted, and interpreted higher-level policies, as well as developing their own policies and programs" (p.37).

School leaders as agents may also view the phenomenon in light of their perceived ability to meet the expectations and demands of the different accountabilities. As it relates to self-efficacy, Bandura (1998) claims that "when faced with obstacles, setbacks and failures, those who doubt their abilities slacken their efforts, give up or settle for mediocre solutions. Those who have strong beliefs in their abilities exert greater effort to master the challenges" (p.59). Consequently, principals' beliefs may determine whether they perceive accountability as a threat to be avoided or a challenge to be met.

Once principal conceptualize the various sources of accountability, they must make choices (Shipps and White, 2009) regarding how they will respond to the demands

placed upon them. In some cases, the decision will result in no action by ignoring the source of pressure. However, if principals choose to attend to the source of accountability they will prescribe activities and strategies that address the call for action.

Accountability Leadership Practices

Using the knowledge gained from the examination of accountability in education thus far, the discussion now turns towards the various practices employed by school leaders in response to accountability. However, despite the descriptions of multiple sources and forms of accountability presented earlier, test-based accountability is the type most often studied which means that we know less about how principals respond to accountability to other sources such as parents, school board members, superintendent, and their conscience. Given all of the influential factors that can influence the recipient's image of accountability reform, it is no wonder that the possible practices that result to manage the demands also vary widely.

In formal test-based accountability systems, some reforms are designed to address the need to improve student learning as measured and reported vis-à-vis accompanying assessment systems (McDonnell and Elmore, 1987; Porter et al., 2004; Stecher et al., 1998). The strategies used to respond to these forms of accountability require the collective effort of individuals throughout the school community. Therefore, accountability efforts may bring people together to examine curriculum or analyze data which may lead to the discovery of solutions or strategies that improve teaching in learning. Professional learning communities may spring up as a way to generate instructional conversations that matter (Rex & Nelson, 2004) and foster a shared sense of responsibility and empowerment. Unfortunately when some accountability measures

require educators to come together, conflict or tension may exist if educators are not used to the practice of collaboration (Watson & Supovitz, 2001).

Principals may also use their position as school leader to allocate key human and physical resources to meet the demands placed upon them (Bulkley et al., 2004; Firestone et al., 2004; Marsh, 2002; Spillane & Thompson, 1997). In many cases, leaders seek out ways to build teacher capacity by imparting their own knowledge and expertise; however, it is more likely to occur by providing opportunities for staff development and professional growth. Similarly, time and other material supports are also offered as ways that principals respond to the calls for accountability. They design schedules that maximize planning and instructional time for teachers and make purchases with school budgets that enable them to target areas of need.

Probably, the most widely debated behaviors that result from accountability systems coupled with high stakes testing are the adjustments made to the curriculum that result in both intended and unintended behavioral changes (Ladd & Zelli, 2002; Resnick et al., 2004; Stecher et al., 2001). In their study of unintended consequence of accountability testing in "mile post" grades, Stecher and Barron (1998), provide specific examples of how teachers' use of classroom time and teaching strategies directly related to whether or not the grade taught was also a grade that was tested. A prevailing negative perspective views the practice of teaching to the test as detrimental to the educational institution. In Popham's (2004) treatise of curriculum, instruction, and assessment he highlighted this precise concern. Specifically, he makes reference to such practices as curricular reductionism, excessive test preparation and modeled dishonesty.

In the some cases, the assessment becomes the guiding force for decisions about resource allocation. Meanwhile time and material resources are allocated to make sure that instruction is best supported in those content areas that are covered on the test–usually to the detriment of other content areas. Staff development and instruction reinforces topics and skills that are aimed at supporting test taking skills and strategies. On the other hand, an optimistic viewpoint sees that high stakes accountability and assessment draws attention to curriculum and instruction in ways that did not take place before. In some cases, curriculum and instruction is modified in ways that support the content area to make it more rigorous, while the quality of professional development to support those efforts also increases (Lane et al, 2002).

In the realm of high stakes accountability, data of any kind become a powerful tool in the repertoire of school improvement strategies. The concept of data-based decision-making plays a key role in many models for school improvement (Ingram et al., 2004). Ingram and her fellow researchers used concepts like Deming's "total quality management" to describe an educational strategy of using data to constantly study and evaluate processes to move organizations forward. In their subsequent study, they discovered that teachers believed that data were either misused or not used by other people which resulted in the decreased likelihood that data would be used or trusted in the future. Popham's (2004) concept of modeled dishonesty occurs when "accountability-pressured teachers use unethical ploys to raise their students' test scores" (p. 423).

The practice of educational triage is another possible response to accountability when performance is not meeting expectations. Educators employ strategies or engage in behaviors that sort and allocate resources on the basis of need for or likely benefit from

extra instruction or attention. Educators end up having to plan quickly with short term

solutions based on what is perceived to be of greatest importance (Garn, 2001). Bulkley

and her colleagues (2004) expanded on this idea by describing the "quick fixes"

associated with teaching teachers how to make minor changes without placing emphasis

on the fundamental learning necessary for long term change. When high-stakes testing

plays a major role in the accountability system, educational triage occurs when educators

focus time and resources on students who show potential of passing the testing and

raising the school's performance. As a result, rather than being used to address the

individual needs of every student, data-driven decision making by administrator and

teachers was employed to target some students at the expense of others (Boohers-

Jennings, 2004). In a study of resource allocation in the Title I programming of three

large urban districts, Sunderman (2001) discovered that administrative decisions in

poorly performing schools were short sighted and thus they "adopted remediation

strategies targeted on particular students, grades, or subjects to accommodate the

accountability mandates" (p. 526). Borba's (2003) study of a reform component of

California's *Public School's Accountability Act of 1999* revealed that respondents

prioritized their actions to raise student achievement in the areas surrounding

standardized tests, academic content standards, teacher training, and teacher planning.

Summary of Literature Review

A review of literature indicates that the concept of accountability is examined

from a variety of perspectives in education; however, much of the research focuses on

test-based accountability systems. Consequently, there is a wealth of information that

defines the forms of accountability as well as some information that describes what principals do to respond to a call for greater student achievement; however, not all accountability is intended to promote student achievement. Furthermore, the perspective of leadership responses to the other forms of accountability presented in this review is largely absent from the literature. In other words, if there are multiple forms of accountability beyond those focused on high-stakes testing, the research is not as thick with descriptions of how principals respond to those other calls for accountability. Therefore, the knowledge-base on the subject would greatly benefit from studies that focus on looking at how principals respond to different types of accountabilities.

Based upon the conceptual framework described earlier and the review of the literature the next section describes the study that was conducted to add to the existing research base and explore the perceptions and practices of principals leading schools amidst the presence of multiple sources of accountability.

CHAPTER III

Methodology

The research design and methods for this study are derived from the experiences of a pilot study conducted in the summer of 2006 which employed qualitative research methods in order to better understand the intersection of accountability and leadership in public education. The collective case study explored the contexts, conceptions, and practices of a variety of school principals in New Jersey who were all subject to many of the same demands for student performance set by high-stakes testing and multiple accountabilities. The results of the study demonstrated the overall feasibility of the design as well as identifying specific points for improvement. Based upon those experiences, the following section provides an overview of the research design used for the current exploration of principal leadership and accountability. Included in this section are the following: descriptions of the overall methodology, sample, data collection strategy, data analysis procedures, role of the researcher, and ethical considerations.

Overall Design

As reflected by the research questions, the current inquiry focuses on obtaining a deeper understanding of leadership and accountability within and across educational contexts. The study purposefully examines cases according to SES and predicted performance on state assessments in order to maximize the variation of perspectives and generate hypotheses. As a "means for exploring and understanding the meaning

individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem" (Creswell, 2007, p. 4), a qualitative approach was chosen to explore the phenomenon while employing minimal quantitative techniques as necessary.

Marshall and Rossman (1999) states that , "Qualitative researchers are intrigued with the complexity of social interaction as expressed in daily life and with the meanings the participants themselves attribute to these interactions" (p.2). Consequently, a phenomenological qualitative design was used to gain a better understanding of the thinking and perceptions of the participants in the study through their experiences as expressed in their own words. Furthermore, a collective case study approach was employed to select multiple cases that can offer different perspectives on the issue (Creswell, 2007). Quantitative elements are included throughout the study to assist with the sampling methodology, when examining pre-interview survey results, and to summarize coding categories. Overall, the study represents a collective case study of public school principals through an analysis of data that is guided by a pre-interview survey and primarily gathered through in-depth interviews.

It is important to note that this study also involved a collaborative data collection effort between two researchers who shared similar interests in principal leadership and accountability. Therefore, some of the information gathered was expressly used for the purpose of this exploration which is focused on leadership and accountability, while other portions were used for a separate study of leadership and problem solving. The sampling designs and data collection approaches share some common elements; however, the analyses were done completely independent of the other.

Sample

Given the relatively small number of cases used in qualitative studies, it was imperative to clearly define a population from which a representative sample could be obtained and data gathered. Beginning with the unit of analysis, the following section describes selection of participants.

Unit of Analysis

Setting the case study within a bounded system (Creswell, 2007) will begin the process of narrowing the broad concept of educational leadership into a sample that will be used to gather information for the study. Therefore, the unit of analysis is the school principal. More precisely, the population for the study examines public middle school principals in the state of New Jersey who had been in the same school for at least three years. Furthermore, only principals in schools that operate under the auspices of a district board of education and are supported by tax dollars are included in the 'public school' category and considered for the study. This distinction effectively excludes private and charter schools, yet includes district academies and magnet schools. Furthermore, to control for variables that may be associated with different types of schools the term middle school is defined as schools that go up to eighth grade, but do not go lower than fourth grade. Only schools that fit these criteria were included as part of the population for this study from which a sample was selected.

Sampling Strategy

One interest of this study is to explore how context influences how principals think and act in their leadership role. In other words, are school leaders' conceptions and responses to accountability a result of their context or independent of their context? To gather data to respond to the question, the sample chosen for the study is based upon two contextual variables (Table 1). One dimension focuses on the context of the community as determined by SES. The other dimension focuses on the context of the school as determined by predicted performance on state assessments. The following section describes the sampling strategy for the study.

SES is used as one of the dimensions in the sampling criteria to examine if principals' responses vary depending on the relative poverty or wealth of the school community. Although higher poverty schools may present challenges because of some of the external forces commonly associated with low SES communities such as widening achievement gaps, high incidences of violence, and low parental involvement, research described earlier indicates that SES does not have a significant effect on the values and efficacy beliefs of individuals (Tschannen-Moran and Gareis, 2004 & 2007).   In the context of accountability, SES does influence how schools respond to being considered as a school in need of improvement (Diamond and Spillane, 2004). Therefore, including this dimension in the study offers a closer look at how the SES of the community relates to the accountability priorities and subsequent leadership practices of public school principals.

The use of student performance as the other dimension in the sampling criteria is based upon the same premise just described. In the era of NCLB and high-stakes testing, it is important to have a better understanding about how principals think about and respond to accountabilities depending on whether they work in high or low performing schools.

This study uses a stratified purposeful sampling methodology (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003; Miles & Huberman, 1994) to select participants in the data collection process. This type of sample allows the researcher to select cases at clearly defined points of variation, thus permitting analysis of the interaction and differences between cases along the SES and predicted performance dimensions.

Table 1

Sampling Matrix

SES	Predicted Achievement	
	Lower than expected	Higher than expected
Low	4 participated (6 approached)	6 participated (8 approached)
High	9 participated (13 approached)	6 participated (11 approached)

The first dimension attempts to vary the respondents according to socioeconomic status based upon the state's District Factor Grouping (DFG) associated with the school where they work. According to the New Jersey Department of Education (2008), DFG represent a composite measure of SES which included variables such as education, occupation, employment, and income. The use of SES in the current study facilitates the comparison of responses between principals in similar as well as different SES contexts.

The second dimension in the sampling matrix is based upon predicted performance on state assessments. Relying on publicly available data, a regression model

(Appendix A) was completed that examined unexpectedly high and low performance among middles schools. The dependent or response variables used in the regression were a composite of the language arts literacy scores and mathematics scores on the Grade Eight state assessment for 2004, 2005, and 2006. The independent or explanatory variables used in the regression included values that controlled for ethnicity, poverty, language proficiency, enrollment size, per pupil resources, and district contextual factors such as DFG. The result of the least square regression produced a list of outlier school principals whose performance was higher or lower than expected based upon the ordinary least squares residual values that ranged from -3.022 to 4.719.

Once a sample was identified from which to select participants calls were made to outlier principals by selecting those who were on both ends of the list based upon higher and lower than expected performance trying to balance the number of participants along the SES dimenstion. After contact was made and consent was received, the sampling matrix consisted of a total of 25 principals (Table 1). Consequently, the sample includes four principals in the low SES and lower achievement quadrant, nine are in the high SES and lower achievement quadrant, and six are in each of the low SES and higher achievement and high SES and higher achievement quadrants.

Data Collection

The primary method of data collection for the study took place from July 2008 through April 2009 via in-depth interviews designed to elicit specific information associated with the conceptual framework. During this time, NCLB had been actively in place in public schools throughout the state. Assessment data and school improvement summaries were made publicly available on an annual and schools that did not meet AYP

were implementing the required sanctions. By this time, many schools, including some in the study, were subject to some of the most extreme sanctions required under the legislation; however, the imposition of the sanctions was still relatively new territory for the state department of education and the schools impacted.

To begin the process, a pre-interview survey was used to collect data from each participant in order to guide the in-depth interview. Each method of data collection is described in greater detail below.

Pre-interview Survey

Based upon the experiences gained from the pilot study the pre-interview survey (Appendix D) was to start the data collection process. The purpose of the survey was two-fold: 1) to gather information to facilitate the face-to-face interview and 2) to obtain self-reported data regarding principals initial perceptions of accountability. The completion of the pre-interview survey enabled the researcher to have access to information that was used to probe further during the in-depth interview.

The pre-interview survey includes an opportunity for each participant to review and rank order a predetermined list of sources of accountability according to the sources to which they feel most and least accountable. The seven categories for the survey are a direct outcome of the sources of accountability as described in the literature and those reported by the participants in the pilot study. The sources include: district/central office, parents, state testing/Adequate Yearly Progress, your own conscience, board of education, teachers, and other principals.

In order to effectively use the pre-interview survey in the data collection process, the instruments were created and delivered to the respondents via email. The pre-

interview survey was created using *Zoomerang*, a commercially available web-authoring and delivery service. After contact was made with the principal, (s)he was invited to participate in the pre-interview survey and sent a hyperlink through e-mail to complete the survey. To protect the confidentiality of the respondent, the researchers are the only individuals who have access to the data. The researchers checked periodically to see whether the survey was completed or not and sent out reminders whenever necessary. Since the interview was guided, in part, by the responses to the pre-interview survey, the participants were encouraged to complete the survey prior to the interview to the extent possible; however, paper copies of the survey were brought to the interview for the principals to complete if they did not do so on-line.

In-depth Interview

A standardized open-ended interview (Patton, 1990) assuming a conversational approach (Marshall & Rossman, 1999) was used to interview each participant with opportunities for further probing at predetermined areas of the interview. The main rationale for the use of the in-depth interview protocol is to explore the phenomena as expressed in the words of the school leaders themselves; therefore, the interview data facilitates the search for patterns and relationship through the analysis of the participants responses. Standardized open-ended interviews also maximize the amount of information gathered in a limited amount of time in order to respect the personal and professional demands of each respondent. The final reasons attempt to equalize the quality and quantity of information collected and minimize the potential for variation in the data collection as a result of having multiple researchers conducting the interviews.

The questions for the interview guide (Appendix E) were developed in three phases. The first phase involved the creation of draft guides with questions aimed to capture the individualized needs for data required by the pilot studies conducted by each researcher. In the second phase, the two guides were combined, refined, and reduced to three main categories of questions: leader's priorities, leader's conceptions of accountability, and leader's conceptions of and responses to problems. Once complete, the pilot study was conducted with a first round of four interviews where each interviewer asked the questions in a different order based upon the three categories, after which the quality and efficiency of the interview guide was assessed and adjustments were made. Next, the researchers further refined the interview questions and protocols based upon the data collected and the different interview experiences. The resulting guide was used to collect an additional four interviews included in the pilot study. Once the pilot data was evaluated, minor adjustments were made to the first two sections of the guide in order to probe additional areas and refine the questions based upon the richness of the data collected. The third section was replaced with a problem scenario which was developed in order to standardize principal reactions to the problems they face as practitioners.

Given the sample size and the scope of the study all interviews were digitally recorded from start to finish. During the interview, the researcher asked questions from the interview guide and took notes directly on the guide and organized under the appropriate category and question for easier review and retrieval. After each interview, the researcher immediately added additional field notes and information that was not captured while meeting with the participant to assist with the review of the data. Each

interview was transcribed and saved as a separate file in a format that allowed for easy import into the data analysis software program.

Data Management and Analysis

The management and analysis of the information collected was ongoing throughout the data collection process. As the interviews were completed, all of the data was organized and analyzed through the use of NVivo, a qualitative research software program. The interviews were specifically formatted according to the specifications of NVivo to allow for easier access.

Once the data were entered, the analysis began. In general, the analysis followed the same procedures outlined by Marshall and Rossman (1999) and Miles and Huberman (1994) in order to code the data, test for understandings, and search for alternative explanations. For each case, the review of the data began by generating categories and themes as the first level of coding. Coding categories were initially based upon the conceptual framework described earlier in this paper. During the second review of the data, pattern coding was used to group the summaries of data produced in the first level into "a smaller number of sets, themes, or constructs" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 69). Tables were used to summarize and display the findings for each case to facilitate cross-case comparisons of the principals' responses. Throughout the analytic process the researcher continually cycled through the data to evaluate the themes generated by searching for instances that supported or challenged the patterns and identified alternative explanations that existed to assess their plausibility (Marshall & Rossman, 1999).

Role of the Researcher

As described earlier in this chapter, the data collection for this study involved two researchers who were interested in studying the same population for slightly different reasons. Therefore, clearly defining the roles of the researcher was critical to ensuring reliability of the data collected and safe guarding against any technical and ethical concerns associated with this type of research as well as negotiating entry into the lives of the participants (Marshall and Rossman, 1999).

A number of factors support the reliability of the data being collected by more than one researcher. First and foremost, each researcher was involved in the design and development of the other's study from the beginning stages of the process. Therefore, both researchers are very familiar with the research questions, goals, and objectives of the other's study. Reliability is further enhanced in the creation of the data collection instruments. The items included in the pre-interview survey and interview guide were jointly developed according to the needs of each study and based upon the experiences gained as a result of the pilot study conducted previously by the researchers. The on-line survey was able to collect data free from the possible influence or bias of either researcher's presence. Whereas, the standardized nature of the interview guide with clearly articulated probes ensured that the same data were collected regardless of the researcher. The common understanding of the two studies by each researcher, combined with the joint development of standardized instrumentation supports the overall reliability of the data collected.

Based upon a description of deployment provided by Patton (1990, cited in Marshall & Rossman, 1999), the researchers in this study had minimal participation in

the daily life of the participants. Instead, the researchers relied on gaining access to those

experiences and the meaning ascribed to them by the principals exclusively through the

data gathered via the pre-interview survey and in-depth interview. Furthermore, the

researchers offered full disclosure of the research interests to the participants prior to the

interview in order to establish trust and avoid any ethical problems associated with

secrecy. The key to success by the researchers was negotiating entry to the principals.

Given the time constraints placed upon the population under study, the

researchers relied heavily on their professional association with the participants in order

get them to participate. The initial contact with the principals was made through personal

phone calls to the principals workplaces using publically available contact information

from school websites. The initial conversation provided a brief introduction of the

researchers' professional and academic background followed by a general description of

the study and concluded with an invitation to participate. Participation requirements were

clearly outlined ahead of time including the need to complete the on-line consent form

(Appendix C) and pre-interview survey (Appendix D) as well as meet for a face-to-face

interview. Principals who offered oral consent scheduled a time and place to conduct the

interview and received a confirmation via email and US mail. The email and postal

message expressed gratitude for the principal's willingness to participate and included the

date, time, and location of the interview, as well as the link to the pre-interview survey. A

consent form (Appendix B) was included as an attachment for the participant's

superintendent to review, sign, and return at the time of the interview as required by the

Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Ethical Considerations

Any potential concerns associated with qualitative research have been alleviated in a variety of ways. Upon approval of the proposal for the study, the researcher submitted the appropriate documentation to IRB prior to commencing any contact. Starting with the identification of participants and the informed consent, the researchers maintained a level of complete transparency in their approach throughout the process. They were forthcoming and honest at all times with the participants. When collecting the data via the web and during interviews, only the researchers had access to any data that revealed the respondents' identity. Finally, once the data were transcribed, organized, and analyzed, the written report discusses the findings with 100% anonymity and uses only pseudonyms in place of real names.

CHAPTER IV

Findings

This study explores how principals differ in their conceptions of accountability, what internal and external forces influence them, and the different leadership practices they employ in response. Most principals identified themselves as the most salient source of accountability. The analysis further identified specific forces that influenced their experiences when school leaders identified primary conceptions of accountability other than themselves. In response to the pressures they perceived, principals then shaped their leadership tasks according to the demands placed on them by each source of accountability.[1]

Conceptions of Accountability

Principals reported on their most prominent accountabilities through both surveys and interviews. With both data sources, "accountability to self" was selected most often. One survey question presented principals with a list of sources of accountability. They were asked to rank the items in order of those things to which they felt 'Most

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[1] To maintain confidentiality, participants will be identified using a four digit numbering system that characterizes the participants along the sampling dimensions – achievement and SES – followed by a case number. The first two numerals identify the achievement and SES designations respectively for each participant – using "1" for low and "2" for high. The last two numerals refer to the unique case number assigned to each participant.

Accountable' (1) and 'Least Accountable' (7). Three respondents did not complete the

survey at all and two others identified multiple categories with the same number. Just

over half the principals selected their own conscience as their major source of

accountability (Figure 2). Other sources of accountability included teachers, mentioned

by four, and other principals, mentioned by three. Finally, three principals mentioned the

central office and two cited AYP. Yet, there were some inaccuracies in the survey

responses. Some principals stated that when taking the survey on line they mistakenly

reversed the order of the ranking and assigned the highest number to the source to which

they felt most accountable. Consequently, the pre-interview survey was used as a prompt

to frame the interview with each participant.
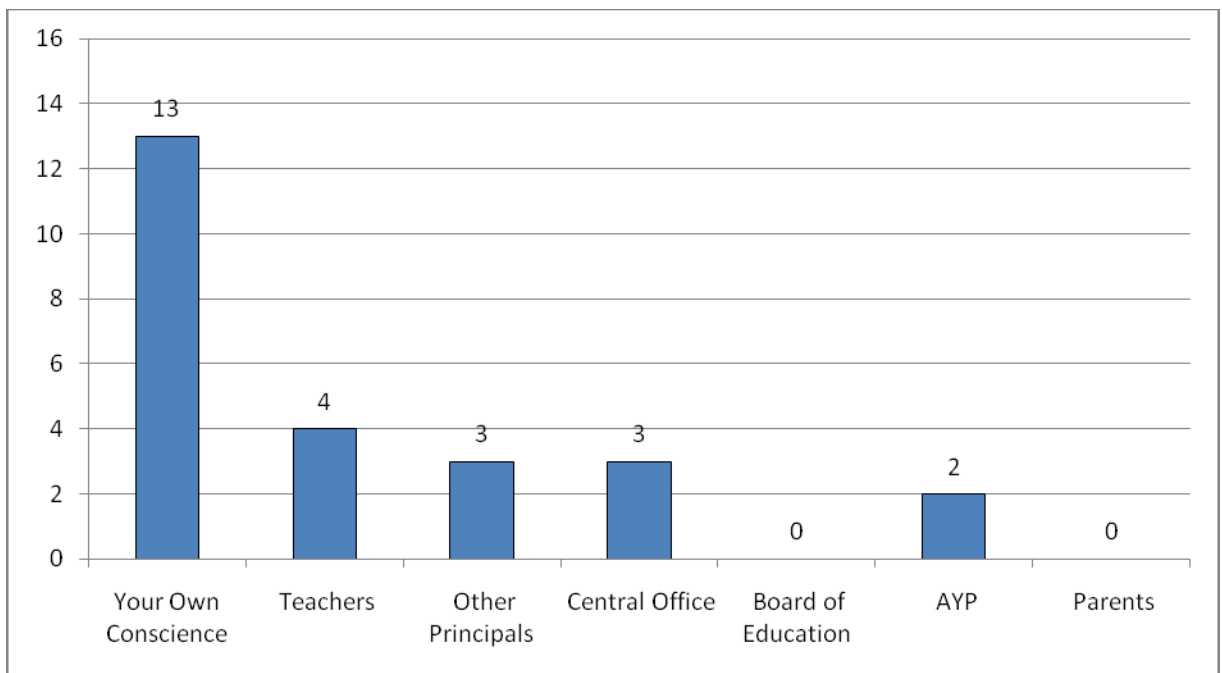
Figure 2. Sources ranked "Most Accountable" (1) in Pre-interview Survey

The principal's conscience was further confirmed as the most prominent source of

accountability during the principal interviews (Figure 3). Fourteen principals selected

their own conscience as their most important source of accountability. Beyond that, there

was an almost even distribution amount other sources. Parents, the superintendent, and

AYP/NCLB were each identified by three different principals and two stated that they

were most accountable to teachers.
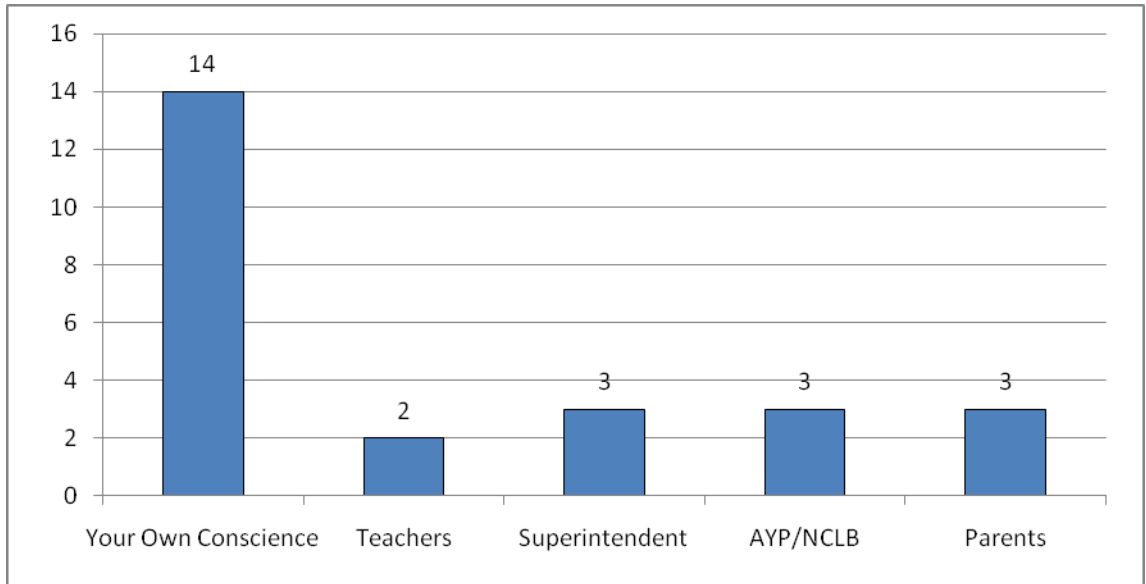
Figure 3. "Most Accountable" sources discussed during interview

The remainder of this section presents the conceptions of accountability revealed

by the principals through their interviews. The findings are discussed in depth and are

grouped according to the constituency specified as the source of accountability. The

typology of accountabilities presented by Firestone and Shipps (2005) is used to connect

the source to a potential accountability mechanism to better understand why it may be

such a salient presence in the principals' lives.

Accountable to Self

Accountability to self can be described as being motivated by an intrinsic

obligation to act rather than responding directly to a specific external pressure. This

section looks more closely at this internal source of accountability according to the

following themes that emerged: educational mantra, navigation tool, and personal

experiences.

Educational mantra. Six principals describe their self-imposed accountability as

akin to a daily educational mantra. Their student-centered values, morals, and beliefs are

the reason these principals entered the profession and what keeps them motivated.

Beyond merely viewing the principalship as a vocation, their job is part of a personal

philosophy to lead a life that is personally satisfying and meaningful. From the moment

she steps out of bed Principal 21232 pushes herself to do the best that she could for the

school community that depended on her leadership.

> I need to get up in the morning and look myself in the mirror and say,
> okay, I'm doing the best job that I possibly can for the students, for my
> staff, for my parents and for me to think that I truly am leading. So that's
> where it starts, it starts with my conscience. If I feel within my heart and
> my mind that I'm moving this place in the right direction with the
> barometer of being ultimately in the best interest of the children here, then
> I think I'm doing a good job.

Principal 11214 is of a similar mindset. She sees her actions as a reflection of her core

values and beliefs as a person and a professional. In her words, "I understand that this is

my job, and no matter what I've ever done in my life, I do it to the best of my ability. I

live with integrity and honesty. I do nothing that does not lead with integrity."

Personal integrity is very important to these school principals. Their

accountability to themselves requires that they are reflective in their practice; therefore,

they take stock of their actions each day to see how they measure up. Principal 11118

uses personal accountability as a barometer for judging his actions and as a way to keep

himself in check when he acts in a manner that did not meet his standards.

> It's a level of integrity. When I drive home tonight -- or to the gym where
> I run -- I replay my day and I have to ask myself, "Have I been the best
> [states his name] I can be?... And I swear to you -- I swear to God -- there

> are days… I can't wait 'til the next morning 'cause I wanna be at that door, and wanna bring that kid over and say, "I need to talk to you."… I'll say to them, "I'm sorry. I was too tough on you yesterday. I was too harsh. I over-reacted." And -- and that's a level of integrity and decency and dignity and loyalty that I think is absolutely necessary.

Accountability for these principals is a way of making sure that they live their lives commensurate with their values and beliefs. Similarly, principals also use this form of accountability to navigate the complexities associated with their job.

Navigation tool. Despite the presence of other sources of accountability, six participants describe their accountability to their own conscience as a means of staying focused on their own values whenever it becomes difficult to do so. Similar to educational mantra, these school leaders maintain their own set of expectations and priorities; however, they also use them to manage all of the other pressures surrounding them. When pulled in different directions by various constituent groups, they look within in order to determine their course of action. In the end, the pressure that most aligns with their personal values and beliefs wins out. Principal 12212 describes her conscience as the way she handles the tug of war between her priorities and other external demands.

> My conscience is what I am… Even though we got all these stuff, for a lack of better word, coming at us from everywhere… accurate test taking, how we administer the test, all those things, accountability to the central office, to the parents… I have to do it the way that I went in to this profession that the kids come first, that is what we are here for.

Despite being bombarded with demands from all different directions, personal accountability allows these principals to maintain their focus.

Principal 21236 also portrays accountability to herself as the way to negotiate the multiple demands placed on her as she carries out daily tasks. Instead of trying to make sense of everything, she uses accountability to herself as the way to avoid getting distracted by less important priorities and remain focus on her students.

> You know there are a lot of things that frustrate the leadership of any
> school because there are so many variables. You have so many bosses.
> Almost anyone can be your boss, but at the end of the day you are
> responsible for leading the academic charge so you have to negotiate your
> priorities… if you always follow what's right for children, you don't have
> prioritize and you know what to do next and you make the right decisions
> even if they are the hard ones.

Being accountable to oneself tests principals' commitment to their own values and beliefs

in the face of potentially competing demands and ideals that surround them. Principals

21126 and 21135 garner strength through their steadfast belief in being responsible for

the general welfare of all children. Although doing what is right sometimes runs contrary

to the expectations of others, it is easy to manage as long as they final decision is made in

the best interest of children. Principal 21126 uses his personal accountability to reconcile

the conflicts he encounters from other potential sources of influence along the way.

> I always do the right thing. Sometimes, it might be controversial and I
> take a stand if I know it's the right thing to do. Because when I go home, I
> want to go home with a clear mind and say, "I did the right thing." And if
> it's an argument or a battle with money, contractors, a parent, a student,
> the policies in the realm of education always got to be bigger than one
> person so I have to be satisfied when I do the right thing.

Likewise, Principal 21135 feels pressure to be true to his own conscience. He believes

that everyone, including his teachers, watches what he does and pays attention to the

decisions he makes.

> I've never been in the position of doing something that I don't feel is
> comfortable -- doing something that is not good for the kids. I mean you
> can see it. I wear my emotions on my sleeve and the teachers know if I'm
> trying to say something that I will have to deliver from central office…
> and they all see right through. They know where I'm coming from so I
> think I never want to jeopardize my conscience… And ultimately that's
> the best for the kids if I have them in mind.

Ultimately, the internal pressure placed on principals by their own conscience can be the

greatest motivating factor in their work. Principal 12110 recognizes that the immense

pressure he puts on himself, but it is also the way that he avoids getting bogged down in

the day to day administrivia.

> Well, I have high expectations ahead, I think that's the only way I can
> answer that. That my expectations are high and I owe kids a lot. I owe
> them the best that I can be for them because that's the best way I can put
> it… I like to think that I put more pressure on myself than the school
> board or the school administrations, actually the administration. I think I
> put more pressure on myself to be the best. What they get me on, is
> sometimes I don't get to my paper work... but I put the kids first.

Principals who ascribe to this form of accountability use it as a way to sort through the

everyday demands placed on them in order to find the things that align with their values

and beliefs.

Personal Experiences. Internal accountability for two principals is defined by

their personal experiences. For one principal there is a direct connection to the school

where he works while the other attributes his motivation to his family history.

As a resident of the community where he works, Principal 22122 claims a vested

interest in the success of the school district and sets his standards accordingly. The

overlap between community member and principal creates a unique circumstance for

him. "I've lived in this community thirty years, so this is just not another place for me,

you know, I'm three miles away from here so the expectations are high for myself. And I

think people realize that I set the expectations, and therefore -- they better get on with

them!" As a professional and a tax paying citizen his motivation stems from the pressure

he puts on himself to perform his job effectively.

Principal 21124 attributes his intrinsic drive to his life experiences. Growing up in

the depression he simply heeds his father's sage advice, "as long as you are taking pay

from an employer you do the job. If you no longer want to do the job… get another job.

And that's the way I approach it." Consequently, his commitment to hard work and

appreciation for being employed continues to carry him through his 44 years in education.

> A year ago last February first, standing right here at this desk I had a stroke… and I missed three and a half months of work. Today I still have over 300 accumulated sick days. I could have missed more than three and a half months of work. I could have collected disability insurance plus my full pay if I had chosen to do that… We can come up with a lot of excuses, but at the end of the day you got to go home go to sleep at night and you got to get up in the morning and do it all again. If you aren't doing it within parameters that you can live with then you are not going to be doing it very long…I've been doing this for 44 year… and if I couldn't operate by that philosophy I don't think I could have gone quite that long.

Internal pressure motivates these principals by aligning their actions with their personal and professional core values.

Accountability Mechanism. When examining the mechanism by which this source of accountability operates, it is somewhat unique in terms of the relationship described by Adams and Kirst (1999) as the principal and agent are one and the same. The one who is held accountable is also the entity to whom accountability is owed. Accountability to self also seems to clearly align with the characteristics associated with moral accountability (Firestone and Shipps, 2005) . Consequently, expectations are not set by others; instead, they are judged for their performance through self reflection and the evaluation of their actions against their own values and standards.

In spite of outside forces, this form of moral accountability outweighs all other sources of pressure for these principals. Values such as integrity and social justice commonly associated with this form of accountability are seen through a strong focus on children and frequent references to notions of "doing the right thing" and "servant leadership". In their minds, there is no greater source of pressure as a school leader than

living up to the notion "to thine own self be true". It guides their actions and interactions and gives them the intrinsic drive to do their job to the best of their ability.

The next section explores another form of internal accountability that illustrates how professional obligations greatly influence perceptions of accountability among principals.

Accountable to Other Educators

Another source of accountability for school leaders comes from the professional pressures they feel as a result of being an educator. The conceptions of accountability in these cases are prompted by the sense of responsibility they feel to the other educators with whom they work. These school leaders view themselves as members of a team of professionals who work across classrooms, grades, and schools to support students. Three of the participants describe this sort of relationship with other educators. Two principals report feeling most obligated to their teachers while one principal describes a secondary obligation to other principals.

Teachers. Principals view themselves as a vital member of a team of educators who work to meet students' needs. They believe that teachers are the key personnel responsible for providing direct instruction to the students while the principals take care of providing staff with the resources and support. Principal 22123 feels obligated to provide his teachers with strong leadership and a strong vision.

In my belief, I'm the one that needs to be held accountable to teachers. They look to you for everything that transpires in the school district and to

> set a clear vision as a principal… The other ones that are actually on the list didn't seem to affect me as great as my belief as being accountable to teachers… I think that's the team concept… Consistently, it's the fact that we're a team. I'm with you so I'm held accountable with them.

He understands the importance of his role on the instructional team and takes it very seriously.

Principal 22131 believes his teachers need to see courageous leadership in order to feel support in their efforts. He believes it is his duty to provide them with the essential tools and environment to get the job done.

> They are on the frontline or in the trenches for lack of a better term to use. I guess you could translate that however you need to, but I need to clear the way for them to do their job. I need to get the obstacles out of the way, make sure that they have the resources… I am fortunate to have quite a few risk takers here on the staff and I have to let them know that it is okay to take a risk.

He feels compelled to meet the unspoken expectations of his staff and believes that they need a model of excellence to guide their work in the classroom.

Other Principals. Principal 21232 is the only respondent who refers to accountability to other principals. She describes it as a secondary source of accountability whereby she feels obligated to work closely with other principals. In particular, she strives to build upon the foundation set by the sending elementary school in order to best prepare the students for successful entry into the high school.

> You need to be aware of who's sending you those children in the middle school and where their headed. And so there's accountability when you are in the middle school to both ends. There's an accountability to elementary school principals that you're providing the proper transitioning tools for those children to make it once they hit the middle school and there's an accountability to the high school principals to make sure you're preparing them in those three years that they are here they'll have the tools

to function at the high school. So that's where the accountability of the principals come in, being in middle, I've got no sides.

Principal 21232 wants to do her part to support students as a member of the administrative team within the school district.

Accountability Mechanism. Although principals feel accountable to other educators, it is not the teachers or other principals who are setting the specific expectations in these cases. Instead, characteristics associated with moral accountability appear to be the driving force behind obligations felt toward other educators in these cases. Their beliefs are intrinsically motivated by a professional obligation to perform as a member of the school community for the betterment of their students (O'Day, 2002).

The moral accountability attributes of empathy and commitment to one's own values (Firestone and Shipps, 2005) are exhibited by principals in this group through their unwavering dedication to their professional colleagues. Whether motivated by moral or professional obligations, these principals do not want to let themselves or others down. Consequently, success in their endeavors provided internal satisfaction; whereas, failure resulted in feelings of disappointment. Principal 21232, acknowledges her accountability to her fellow principals, but believes that "all of us are ultimately accountable to ourselves". Her statement illustrates how her accountability to herself shapes her views of other sources of accountability.

The following sections move beyond internal accountability and examine the external sources of accountability experienced by principals in the study.

Top-Down Accountability

Another source of accountability for participants comes from the perceived

pressure that results from the formal top-down structure of the school district. These are

cases where principals simply respond to being placed in a subordinate role. Although the

coding category focuses on accountability to the superintendent, the principals often refer

central office administration and the board of education interchangeably with the

superintendent's office as principals take direction from all these entities and feel

responsible to meet their expectations. Although many principals in the study mention

feeling pressure from their superiors, only three of them identify it as their greatest source

of accountability.

Line authority. In general, comments in this category reflect a basic line authority

conception of accountability whereby subordinates who report to superiors and are

required to provide an account of their performance. Principal 12105 sees it as a simple

artifact of personnel management in public schools. Put simply, central office and the

superintendent provide the direction and the principals follow.

> I think that's because ultimately that's who I answer to. If I don't fulfill
> my obligations and responsibilities to the superintendent or Central Office,
> then I'm at risk of losing a job or whatever it is… So I always feel like it
> goes back to the Board of Ed, the superintendent, their expectations and
> their policies, because that's what I'm charged to do is really deliver on
> those. Not always what the whims of parents are, the whims of teachers
> are, the whims of the state, you know, it's all -- to me the immediate
> responsibility is to the Central Office.

He believes that he was hired by a board of education that represents the community and

he is merely required to meet the terms of his employment.

> I think accountable meaning to implement, to support the policies and the
> expectations set forth by the Board of Ed which as an extension of the
> superintendent -- or the superintendent probably is a little bit of an

extension of the Board of Ed -- just making sure that I implement those
policies and support those policies, and what their expectations are of me
since they pay my salary.

Fortunately for Principal 12209, she agrees with superintendent's beliefs and priorities.

According to her, "The things that he responds to tells me what his priorities are. And the

things that frustrate him like the state office and what they are doing with him and just

shows that there is a strong alignment with his principals and what he expects his

administrative team to do." Her respect for his leadership and expertise seems to shape

her perception of accountability as a positive experience. Accountability to one's superior

can be viewed as a way to simplify the complex nature of the job by enabling principals

to know exactly who they report to and what is expected of them. However, in other ways

it can make things more difficult.

At times, this form of accountability conflicts with others. Principal 1121 wants to

be guided by her conscience, but she does not feel that she has much of a choice. "I have

to be accountable to my boss and the board of education... I'm not saying I agree with it,

but I have to be accountable." Principal 21228 has similar feelings of being pulled in

different directions by conflicting demands.

> Of course, there's going to be some from the top. There's always going to
> be demands like elimination of certain programs that they feel aren't
> important to the students... That's an added pressure that you have to kind
> of balance and also the many changes that are happening within the
> curriculum that again come from the top; and having to be a mediator
> between the teachers and central office; and having to make [teachers] buy
> into a change in the curriculum and then having teachers be—I wouldn't
> say defiant, especially the veteran teachers that are—they're not in
> agreement with curriculum changes or what they have to teach or how
> they have to teach. That's always difficult to mediate with the teachers.
> You want to be supportive but yet, you have to meet with what the district
> is asking me to do and having to police it in the classroom because of that
> door being closed.

Dissonance occurs when there is a misalignment between values, beliefs, and priorities of the principals and those of their superiors and principals feel caught in the middle.

The pressures that come from a superintendent are sometimes compounded by other factors. For instance, the specific context where Principal 22119 works strongly influences his feeling of accountability.

> It's been very difficult for me for the last year and a half. For seven years I had a superintendent who was very hands off. You know, I could just about do anything and he would support anything I did. I was extremely loyal to him. He was extremely loyal to me and then he left. We got an interim who was just basically interested in doing whatever the Board of Education wanted and there was a lot of politics involved. And now we have a new sort of permanent superintendent and -- that's probably why I put that first as I was going through the survey. I've had a bad year and a half. It's really been -- it's so bad that I wanna take… the first job as an assistant principal in a decent high school.

The change in leadership and leadership styles combined with a particular event results in a negative accountability experience for this principal.

Accountability Mechanism. Top-down authority exemplifies this bureaucratic form of external accountability. Governed by policies and procedures, principals who emphasize accountability to the superintendent rely on a formal line authority to manage their actions and their priorities. Their comments suggest an acceptance of their role and responsibility within the organization and reveal their ultimate motivation to comply with the expectations of their administrative superior. Job security is a strong incentive that drives principals to respect the chain of command. Even though their superiors may be motivated by other sources of pressure, the principals are accountable to their bosses.

Accountable to NCLB

It comes as no surprise that there are some principals who feel a great sense of accountability to the formal external accountability measures in place during the time of this study. The perceived and actual consequences that accompany NCLB and high-stakes testing are prominent influences in the work of three principals. Whether motivated by the stigma attached to being labeled as a failing school or dealing directly with the sanctions of not meeting AYP, the demands of the federal legislations remain at the forefront of these principals' minds.

As a result of the integral connection between NCLB and AYP targets, the principals used these terms interchangeably. Consequently, the concerns about not performing well on the state assessments are tied directly to the related legislative sanctions. Principal 11113 is fearful of losing his job if he is unable to meet the performance benchmark.

> There's accountability in all areas, but the one that I find the most frustrating is the standardized test score…'cause really that's what comes down -- if No Child Left Behind is enforced the way it's supposed to be they can actually remove your from your position based on that.

Motivation also comes by way of the potential for receiving a negative designation when not meeting the standards set by the legislation. The School In Need of Improvement (SINI) status ascribed to a school becomes a symbol of shame for the principal. Principal 11101 is extremely sensitive to this aspect.

> Well I think state testing is how schools are labeled. If their testing is below the norm or below the accepted rate by the state you're designated as a school under review or school in trouble if you will. And that leaves such a terrible stigma with parents, with the community and once you've obtained that status of being a school that's a non-achiever, it's very difficult to climb out of that hole that you're in. So I think state testing

and how school does with state testing is very important in terms of determining the future of that school.

The nature of the federal accountability system places the actions of the principal and the school in the spotlight for public review and scrutiny. Once deemed unsuccessful, it is viewed like a scarlet letter that is difficult to shed.

Beyond the fear of the possible consequences, motivation for some principals also results from living with actual sanctions once they are imposed. For instance, as a school subject to state intervention, Principal 11103 received regular visits from a team of representatives who reviewed the school's practices and outlined corrective action measures.

> About a week ago I had a one-day [CAPA] benchmark meeting and prior to the visit I had a phone conversation with the representative coming out and somehow we got on this whole thing about the number of visits I've had in the past four years. I remember telling her that that when you come out you are going to see some good stuff. I know we have grown I said. I will tell you initially the process felt very punitive. I kind of felt like you know as a principal I'm being targeted as this bad guy because my scores aren't what they should be

However, for this principal, it is not perceived as all bad. After years of feeling bad about the sanctions, Principal 11103 sees opportunities for professional and organizational growth.

> But over the years I've kind of used the process as part of my own personal growth experience. I have learned a lot and I have discovered that folks coming out telling you the not so good stuff actually kind of helps you if you are open to it and you are actually being honest and say, "hey you know they are right about this because I really do need to work on it."

In his view, the sanctions imposed upon the school provide technical assistance and feedback to address some of his most critical issues.

> To be honest I had not experienced any [sanctions]. There was a restructuring plan that was completed by the district but that amounted to the addition of the Read 180 program. I got some additional literacy tutors, but there was no change of other staff. I mean nothing that was initiated by the district. I was not replaced as principal. I was eventually given two vice principals who have actually worked tremendously well. Other than that I really haven't felt any consequences unless you want to consider constant visits from the CAPA team as some sort of consequence.

For Principal 11103, his attention to NCLB does not stem from the fear of sanctions, rather it comes as a result of the opportunities the corrective actions afford to improve student achievement.

Accountability mechanism. High stakes assessments receive so much attention because as a policy instrument, NCLB uses AYP as short term proximate measures for longer-term effects (McDonnell and Elmore, 1987). However, as an accountability system the same legislation tries to address performance and equity issues through the use of state-controlled sanctions and rewards (Firestone and Shipps, 2005). Consequently, principals who identify NCLB as the greatest source of accountability perceive a strong pressure to meet external performance demands because of their direct involvement in the sanctions and corrective measure that are imposed (Brown and Clift, 2010).

For principals who feel most accountable to NCLB, the motivation to act comes less by the receipt of rewards and more through managing the sanctions, if not trying to eliminate them altogether. These three principals fall right into Brown and Clift's (2010) basin of attraction which as characterized by the direct impact of the law in their lives. For them, their SINI status and the management of the sanctions make this source of accountability a very prominent force that calls for a great amount of attention. In addition, as schools within the basin of attraction, the principals find themselves at the

precipice of change with the outcomes dependent upon how well they enact the

corrective actions required of them.

Accountable to the Public

The next source of pressure for principals comes from the need to respond to the

external perceptions and beliefs of the public. These principals vie for the community's

approval by trying to make sure that their schools meet the public's expectations and

standards. The three principals who explicitly ascribe to accountability to parents and the

community assume the role of a salesperson who works to persuade the customers that

they are receiving a high quality product.

Client satisfaction. The customer service perspective focus principals' attention

on keeping their clients happy. Principal 12215 strives to maintain a positive image of her

school. Despite performing well on state assessments, she still feels pressure from the

community to do better.

> I think we have to factor that that's how we're judged… And I think that
> no matter what we do in each of the other domains that is what the public
> looks to. Test scores just happen to be just one of those very objective
> measures of achievement... Well, I think that in our community, there is
> high expectations and I think that's good and I think that's an important
> motivator. So, I think particularly when test scores come out… I think, if
> you look from a state perspective, our test scores are fine… from our
> community's perspective, we need to show improvement.

The perceptions of her parents shapes the reality for the principal.

Principal 12106 is very market oriented and sees numerous parallels to his work

and the world of business.

> I believe that the parents are our customers and the product that we are
> producing is the product that they expect to move on and do well at the
> next level. So my parents are my customers and in any good business, I

feel the most accountable to them. I would say if I look at schools as a
business, which I can in many respects, I want customer satisfaction and I
would put them at the top of any list.

He says that his perspective is based upon the direct feedback he receives from the

parents. Regardless of the other sources of pressure that exist, he firmly believes that if

the parents of his students are happy about their experiences, then he is satisfied with his

performance. Principal 12106 uses the same commitment to his parents as a way to

manage the pressures of the job.

They are the customer… and the product is the key. We are sending the
product to the parents and eventually the product will be a usable product
obviously in the United States… But I can sleep well at night knowing
that the parents will say to me, "This is a good school." And if I could ask
them why, they will tell me some of the things I want to hear, the teachers
are great, the atmosphere is great, and way down on that list somewhere,
for most parents is… "My kids are having a great experience,"… That is
where I get the most rewards.

Accountability for this principal means making sure that he does not disappoint the

parents.

Principal 11116 is moved to act because of the direct connection he has to the

community. Furthermore, as a resident who also has children in the school he senses an

added weight of making sure that he provides to other parents what he wants for his own

children's education.

I feel like they are the stakeholders in the community. I'm a public servant
and they are my boss… They're sending me their children to make a
difference in their lives. And I'm speaking also, not just as a principal, but
I'm also a parent… two of my children attend this school… And I feel,
because of that I have to make decisions based on how my parents, and of
course what I think, is best. But I feel most accountable to them.

He is not overwhelmed by parents trying to tell him what he must do; however, he still

feels obligated to provide a quality education for their children.

The connections between test scores and the perceptions of the school are also motivational forces for principals. Principals who focus on their reputation work hard because they do not want the parents in their community to believe that their children attend a poor performing school. This was the case for Principal 11101 who believes that it is a very difficult job to change the perception of the public once a label has been set.

> I think because what it can do in terms of public perception and while the perception does not always coincide with reality of what goes on a school. Nevertheless, the public's perception is the reality and if their sense is that the school is a non-achieving school, the youngsters are not doing well as evidenced by low test scores on state test; that school then lives in purgatory.

His words summarize the focus of principals who try to respond to public demands for quality education in schools.

Accountability Mechanism. The public scrutiny associated with formal political accountability systems is the primary motivation behind principals who identify their parents/community as the locus of accountability. School leaders feel obligated to provide the public with a high quality educational experience for students; therefore, as a proxy for quality of instruction, high test scores may become the focus for principals who wish to maintain a positive public image. Other principals' concern about the public perception of quality is borne out of a moral commitment to the safety and well-being of students. Their beliefs and values motivate them to focus on taking care of the children who are entrusted to them so that the parents know they are in good hands. In the end, the intrinsic impetus for these principals still makes them feel accountable to the public whom they serve whether it is for the academic performance or the health and safety of their students.

Despite the popularity of NCLB in contemporary discourse surrounding education reform principals choose to describe their greatest source of accountability in a variety of ways. Some focus on external sources of accountability such as the mandates connected to the federal legislation or while others identify members of the school community; however, most principals in this study report themselves as the greatest source of accountability.

To better understand the variation in principal experiences, the next section explores the different internal and external forces that impact principals' sense of accountability.

Influencing Conceptions of Accountability

Principals' conceptions of accountability are influenced by both internal and external forces. In other words, their values and beliefs as well as the cultures and contexts in which principals find themselves are associated with the sources of pressure they perceive in their job. This section explores these forces to illustrate that although all principals report student-centered priorities, there are other factors that influence how they make sense of their accountability experiences.

Internal Forces

Participants were asked to respond to two sets of questions during the interview. The first asked "What is your highest priority as a school leader?" Next, they were asked "What matters most in schools?" and then inquired whether or not politicians, parents, the school board, and teachers agree with their assertion. In response to these questions,

principals reveal student-centered ideals that shape their perceptions and actions as instructional leaders. Their responses also indicate that most of their school community feels the same way with the exception of politicians.

Principal priorities. Without exception, all 25 members of the study identify students as the greatest priority in their job. Participants hold explicit beliefs in what they feel responsible to provide for students - academic performance and safety. According to Principal 12105, " that's what we're here for… to grow socially, to grow academically… in a safe comfortable place." Most of the principals report a student focus that centers on both academics and safety, whereas others target either one or the other (Figure 4). Fifteen of the participants reference student academics and safety as their priority and the remaining 10 principals split between academics and safety.
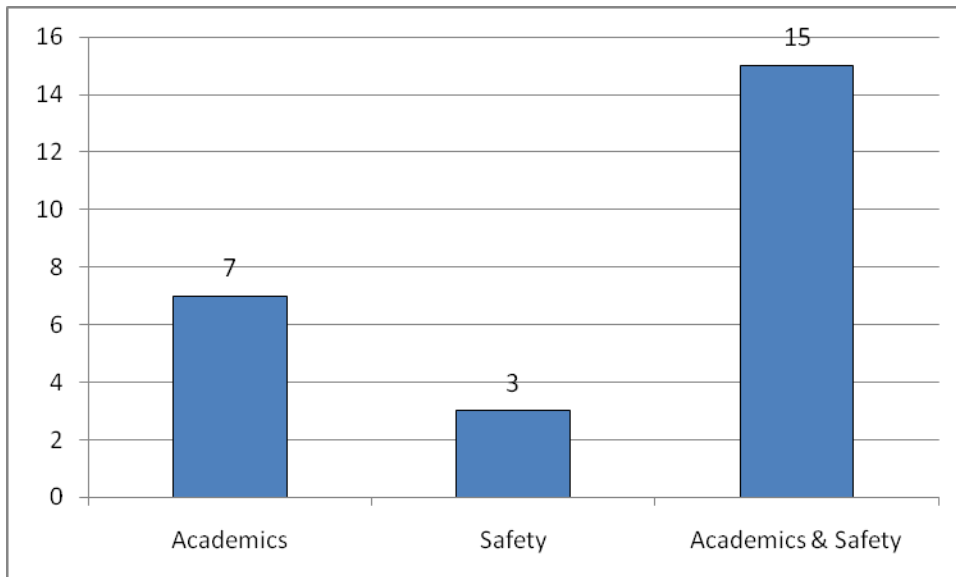
Figure 4. Principals' top priorities

A quality student academic experience is a key tenet of school leadership expressed by many of the participants; however, principals conceive of it in a myriad of ways. In its most general conception, student learning focuses on increasing the

knowledge and skills of students as individual learners. Principal 12102 want to nurture a

love of learning in the school so that students grow academically.

> Probably oversimplified and generalized but basically to see that the kids
> learn. When I meet the kids on the first day of school… I said that I have
> two goals and I hope that they have the same goals… that they learned
> something and more intelligent than they were before…. and the second
> one is to have fun and to feel that going to school should be enjoyable and
> it shouldn't be something that they don't look forward to… So we want to
> have a nurturing environment that concentrates in raising the bar in terms
> of learning.

Similarly, Principal 22121 encourages lifelong learning of the academic skills and the

practical knowledge needed to compete in the real world.

> What I'm seeing now is that kids come out as lifelong learners, creative
> thinkers. Yes they need to do math. Yes they need to write well and
> speak well, but what I'm seeing more in research and what I'm hearing
> more at conferences is that kids can think. They can work on a global level
> and they know how to do teamwork... And those are some of the things
> that I do cover besides the meat and potatoes of resume writing and
> interview process.

He and other principals support a holistic approach to student development. Principal

22120 said that he wants to ensure that students are exposed to opportunities that help

them achieve their potential and enable them to become productive citizens.

> Obviously, the easy answer would be to say student achievement, but I
> think in this community there are other factors that are there. And it's
> about exposing children to what the real world has to offer; about getting
> the most out of children; exposing them to new abilities and new
> experiences they've never had before. The fact that we have children
> whose families are pulling down million dollars a year… but then we have
> children that are first generation Americans that don't even know what the
> country has to offer. And we need to find ways to enrich the experiences
> of all the children… It's a matter of providing a true holistic view of life
> and experiences and preparing children to be contributing members to
> society.

For other principals, the emphasis on student learning is more specific.

Some principals choose to focus on raising student achievement as defined by performance on standardized assessments and meeting AYP as measures of success. For instance, although she identifies herself as her greatest source of accountability, Principal 21228 describes a focus on student learning by collaborating with teachers and supervisors; however, the goal is to "improve upon the students and everybody striving to make AYP and that's what we're hopefully trying to change." Principal 12106 is also student outcome driven and claims, "any way you want to measure it that is my number one goal here to make sure that we have the highest student achievement that we possibly get." Still other principals describe it as meeting the goals and standards set for the school or district through a focus on instruction as stated by Principal 22119. "I would say that in the end, achievement is really what matters… What matters most is setting out goals in the class room and getting there; setting out goals as teams and getting there; setting out goals as a school and getting there." Principals understand that improving the quality of the student learning experience involves more than the instruction in the classroom and that the culture and environment need to be equally supportive of students' needs.

Principals are cognizant of their leadership role in setting a positive tone to bring the school community together. Principal 11113 wants his students to "feel as though they are being treated as valuable, important members of this educational community. I think that's the foundation. My theme is respect in this school right now. I'm just trying to help them learn how to be respectful." Principal 21232 also asserts that a positive and nurturing culture is vital to ensure the academic, social and emotional wellbeing of her students.

> Yeah I think if you set a culture in which everyone is respectful and
> responsible to one another and you grow the understanding that children

are not just all about academics but their academic social, emotional
beings and you have to nurture all of that then you provide for an
opportunity not only for children to succeed but for your staff to succeed
and for your building to succeed as a whole within the community.

The sentiments reflect her belief that communal values and beliefs help meet the

individual needs of the students. To many, a safe environment is a prerequisite to learning

for their students.

Principals who prioritize safety and security, realize that students cannot focus on

academics if they are worrying about too many other things. Consequently, principals

strive to create an environment that is safe to express ideas as well as being free from

physical harm. Principal 12105 wants "them to feel comfortable so they're ready to

learn… a safe place for them to share their thoughts and where they can learn in a

comfortable environment. And not have to worry about whatever dangers are out there."

Principal 21126 views his emphasis on security as a sign of the times and he possesses a

strong obligation to protect students from even the remotest possibility of danger.

Well, again I'm going to have to go back to safety. Today is a good
example. As you came in here and you had to ring the bell. There's a
string of people coming in and out due to construction. They will all
report in here. I don't take anything for granted anymore,even parent-
wise. It's a concern that happened yesterday. A parent came in here and
wanted to get into his kid's locker for whatever reason. I wouldn't let him
do that. I just can't trust individuals anymore in our world. You have to
be safe first and sometimes that gets you into an argument with people and
parents, but that's part of this.

Alternatively, Principal 11101 feels that his primary *value* is that all students can learn

and that his highest *priority* is to create an environment and climate that encourages

teachers and students to strive for success.

I think safe all the way around it. If there is a sense that the environment
is not safe, teachers are not going to be effective as teachers; the
youngsters are not going to be successful students. The entire school

> community has to feel that this is an environment that's conducive to
> youngsters learning and if it's an environment that people have concerns
> or apprehensions about, that there's a high level of anxiety; the youngsters
> are not going to be successful; teachers are not going to be successful.

Creating a space that is free from distraction allows student learning to remain the focus for everyone. According to Principal 12110, it is even simpler than that. "When a parent drops the kid off in the morning, they should have the expectation that they will be returned in same shape before me when they were dropped off then. So first and foremost is safety."

Sometimes the focus on safety is simply a response to pre-existing circumstances. For instance, Principal 11118 inherited a school where positive student discipline was clearly lacking. He describes an environment where "the students ran the building" and the teachers were desperately trying to fix the problem. Based upon his observations when he first started in the position he realized that something needed to be done immediately to improve the school environment.

> Well, I don't know if "out of control" is fair to my predecessor. But let's
> just say that… there was a lot of pushing and shoving. I don't want to give
> you the impression that this was a *bad* school… but I will tell you that
> there was a lot of disrespect, there was a lot of kids in the halls. I mean,
> the first day I was here, the first school day of my first year, I was shocked
> by the number of kids, who when the Pledge of Allegiance was being
> recited… there were kids walking around. I mean -- all I kept saying to the
> teachers is, "We're gonna change. We're gonna re-inspect expectations.
> We're gonna change" -- it's all about expectations.

The focus on students was further strengthened and targeted in his experience when the principal witnessed an urgent need first-hand, thus placing student safety high on his priority list.

While student learning, safety, and security are identified as priorities for all principals in the study, successfully attending to the needs of students requires support from more than just the school leader. It is clear that most principals feel they have support for their beliefs by many of the external influencers around them.

Perceived Priority Alignment. In general, principals believed that their priorities aligned with the members of the immediate school community, but not with legislators (Figure 5). [2] Most principals felt that teachers, parents, and the board of education agreed that academics and/or safety is what mattered most in school. Conversely, on six principals believed that politicians were in agreement.
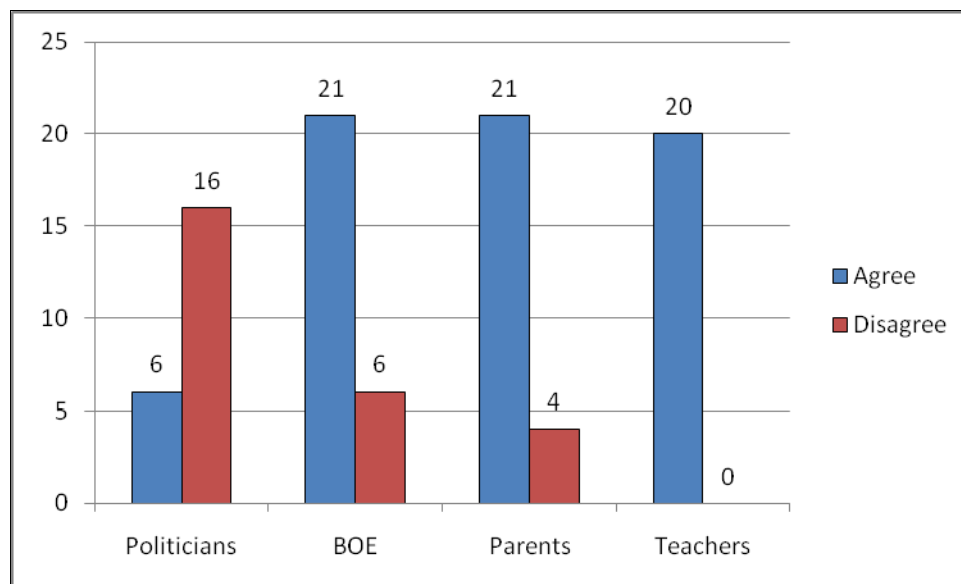

Figure 5. Perceived Priority Alignment with Constituents

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[2] The data show only the responses that were explicitly stated by the principals. Not all participants responded with an answer when asked and others answered with both agreement and disagreement.

In 21 cases, principals and parents seemed to see eye to eye. As Principal 21236 states, "I never met a parent who doesn't want what's best for their child. Many times they don't know how to achieve that and so sometimes their behaviors lead us to believe that their interests are misplaced." Although principals and parents are both student-centered, principals must consider what is best for the hundreds of students under their care while parents are mostly concerned with their own children. Principal 21228 understands the parents' perspective and would expect nothing less.

> I think parents are parents. They're really bombarded with daily living that I don't think they're as informed with what's required of the students now. And as long as their children are safe and they're in school and they're passing through the next grade, I think, that's the most important thing to them. Parents that are at a higher economic scale, of course, their priority is what school is my child going to go to in high school, a better high school, a better setting. And then of course their priority is achievement and advanced achievement, not just average achievement.

Principals do not doubt the importance of security for parents; however, they also feel that the balance tips in favor of demands for academic excellence when the community is generally perceived as safe. Principal 12105's thoughts are based upon current and prior experiences.

> You know a lot of parents, I think in this community at least, I think they would, deemphasize test scores here. So I think in this community as long as their kids are comfortable and happy and feel safe, we tend to find that parents feel very comfortable, happy and safe, based on how the kids feel … I've been in other communities where parents want academic excellence, they want test scores -- if that means discomfort for their kids or their families . . . They want more homework. They want more of that academic press. So I think it's, you know, I think it's a reflection of the community. I've had it both ways.

Therefore, depending on the community and depending on the students, principals sometimes contend with parents who wish to exert pressure and influence when it is most beneficial to them.

The four cases where principals and parents did not see things the same way usually stemmed from differences in opinions about staffing or management related issues. Principal 21126 shared an experience when parents' interest in overriding school policies created potentially dangerous situations.

> Unfortunately, a lot of parents are more concerned about their individual being than the structure setup for everybody. So, they sometimes like to bend the rules and question the rules and policies. I think has been a little bit of a problem that you just can't let them use the cell phone during the day for example and why they can't call if they don't feel good. It's a safety factor. If we have a fire drill, I can't have a kid in the bathroom calling his mother.

Illustrative of the misalignment of priorities, Principal 22119 stated "If I just judged it on what I spend most of my time on, it's not achievement. I spend most of my time on, 'This teacher's giving too much homework,' 'This teacher has something against my kid.'" The end result is that sometimes principals have to redirect their focus when they choose to attend to the pressures placed on them by others.

Principals generally perceive an alignment of priorities with their teachers. Twenty-one respondents feel that teachers would agree with their assertion that student learning and safety are most important; however, many also acknowledge that they are not always going to get everyone on board all the time. According to Principal 21124,

> In the best case scenario they all would, but that's never going to happen. I am a realistic enough person to know that there are some individuals who unless you put them in a situation where sometimes they are going to have to do some things that they may not be totally supportive of well but they are good anyway. They will do them, but they may not do them cheerfully. I would say that the majority would support the cause.

Principal 11116 thinks that his staff is divided down the middle. "The younger staff coming in seem to be much more oriented toward No Child Left Behind, making AYP… whereas the veterans -- I'm not going to say they're having a hard time -- but they need

some convincing. And they're more concerned with structure and security and

discipline." The remaining principals report a shared commitment and understanding

with their teachers. Principal 22119 describes a common focus on student achievement in

addition to an expectation regarding everyone's roles and responsibilities to support that

goal.

> I would say yes, definitely, they would agree on achievement. Most of my
> teachers would say that that's the number one thing for them. If they said,
> 'what's the number one thing for the principal… to be focused on?' It
> would be to make sure that they have a good buffer between them and
> everybody else that could get in the way of them doing their jobs which is
> a really big part of what I do every day.

Principals' comments reflect an overall alignment of priorities among the educational

professionals in the schools.

Principals in the study also perceive a general alignment of priorities with their

district's board of education. 21 of the respondents feel that their board agrees with them

while four principals believe that their priorities lay elsewhere. In part the support for

their priorities comes from their lack of intervention by the board. Some principals have

little or no interaction with members of the board of education. Principal 21124 stated,

> I would say that the school board probably agrees with me. I have it pretty
> much so they don't bother me. It's not that they are coming here trying to
> micro manage me. It's not that I am getting pressure from them to make
> sweeping changes. I am not. So I am going to say judging from the fact
> that I have don't get complaints. I am not standing here saying that they
> call me everyday praising either because that's not it, but at least I am not
> getting the complaints.

Principal 22131 reported "I have little contact with the board; I meet with them once a

month and give them 10-minute report. Most of what they hear from me in that 10

minutes they have already heard already through the superintendent." This is not the case

for all principals.

The changing nature and multiple personalities associated with boards of education also made some principals hesitant to say that there is an alignment of priorities among all members. Principal 21135 recalled a time when his board was very hands off, but saw a change over time when new board members were elected.

> The school board we previously had up until this past April pretty much let us do whatever we wanted within means. I mean the superintendent ran the show and they allowed us pretty much autonomy in each building and they really respected us as educators. Now, it's shifted a little where we have many, many subcommittees… So that's where it shifted. So, there's a lot of micro managing. It's very restrictive. It's very to the point where now they're looking at everything because there was a trust level… There was a vendetta with the superintendent leaving and there's a level of trust that hasn't been build up yet.

Similarly, the various viewpoints and personal agendas held by the different members of the board make a difference in whether principals believe that there is a common agreement even by members on the board. Principal 21228 shared such a scenario.

> I think you have a combination of people on the school board that may feel the way I do and others that are more looking at the data and saying, "Well, this school is in need of improvement so you need to make all these changes or restructuring" and that's without looking at people, just looking at numbers and basing their decision on that.

Despite the complex relationships among board members and between the principals, there appears to be a general agreement in their priorities. The same, however, could not be said for how the principals perceived their alignment with politicians.

When considering the broad category of politicians only six principals suggested that they shared educational priorities. Principal 12106 believes that it is a matter of common sense "For me it's a no-brainer, we are the nuts and bolts. Where the rubber meets the road is in the classroom and I believe the politicians, they may try to peel away

the onion, but that at the base of that onion is going to be teachers and students." Others

think that legislators may agree simply because it is politically correct to do so, but some

are unsure if politicians could truly see things eye to eye. For instance, Principal 12212

believes that politicians could claim that attending to the needs of students is the most

important aspect of schools, but they really would have no idea what it means or how to

achieve it.

> Unless you are in it, you do not understand it. They do not understand it…
> and I think they are really looking at it as business people and wanting to
> get the product, but they are not understanding how to get to the product.

For these principals, politicians' shared beliefs do not seem to help or hinder their efforts

to support students.

Unfortunately, 16 of the principals do not believe that politicians maintain the

same priorities and level of commitment to student learning and safety. They believe that

education reform for politicians is nothing but empty rhetoric used to get elected.

Principal 22122 feels that educational platforms are less about instruction "and because

of their God-given powers… they think they can change everything. And the fact is that

… it makes education so political." According to Principal 22131, all you have to do is

look at the actual legislation to see the difference in priorities between educators and

politicians.

> Again, I am sure they profess that kids are important, but with some of the
> legislation that has been coming out in the state lately, it definitely does
> not demonstrate that. We have just gone through this whole HQT
> business trying to get our teacher certified and… you know that middle
> school is a horror when it comes to highly qualified, and I do not see
> where it has a whole lot of impact on kids.

Principal 21236 says that it all comes down to dollars and cents and that politicians are all

about saving the taxpayers money without regard to the impact it has on students or

schools.

> I think legislators worry about the bottom dollar and… unfortunately all
> the rhetoric that goes with it is sometimes appropriate, but I believe that it
> all boils down to the dollar. I think we do have a responsibility to ensure
> the tax payers money is well spent in school, so I'm not saying that's not
> responsibility of leaders, I am just saying that sometimes we short change
> children in the name of dollar.

The divide between politicians and principals is made clear by Principal 21228 who

echoes the sentiment expressed by others that politicians are too far removed to

comprehend how to reform education.

> No, absolutely not. No, legislators don't have a clue as to what's…
> happening in the school or populations that we serve, the demands that are
> given to us by central office, and state and federal mandates as well. They
> just don't have a clue. It's very easy to put together legislation and say
> you have to meet this and that, just to say they don't have a clue.

Most principals perceive a huge disconnect between what they believe is a priority

compared to what lawmakers identify as most important as reflected in their legislative

actions.

External Forces

In addition to being susceptible to personal values, beliefs, and perceptions,

principals' conceptions of accountability are also subject to the influence of external

forces. These sources of pressure come from a variety of places and vary according to the

situation in which the principals find themselves. The following section looks at some of

the contextual factors principals face related to NCLB school improvement status

designations, school achievement, and SES.

School Improvement Status. Since the sample only included public schools, NCLB is a prominent external force that potentially influences the accountability experiences of all principals in the study. Each participant must contend with the annual state assessments followed by the public review of test scores; however, the imposition of NCLB sanctions which range from providing school choice and supplemental educational service to state intervention and restructuring is reserved for only those schools that do not meet AYP (Table 2). At the time of the investigation 17 of the principals worked in schools that were not considered in need of improvement because they were not subject to any sanctions. Eleven of the participants worked at schools that had consistently met the AYP target and the next largest group of principals were in Year 1 of status which put six of them in the early warning category.

Table 2

School In Need of Improvement Status Distribution of Participants

School In Need of Improvement Status	Number of Participants
Not in "Needs Improvement" Status	11
Year 1–Early Warning	6
Year 2–School Choice	0
Year 3–Supplemental Educational Services	2
Year 4–Corrective Action	2
Year 5–Planning for Restructuring	3
Year 6–Restructuring 1	0
Year 7 & beyond–Advanced Restructuring	1

The remaining eight principals were distributed throughout the improvement status spectrum and subject to the cumulative imposition of sanctions as they missed AYP for consecutive years. As a result, principals who are a school in need of

improvement (SINI) must respond to the external demands of NCLB in a way that schools not in status do not have to worry about. A closer look at the profile of schools in status compared to those not in status reveals a pattern of attributes that points to the influence SES has on NCLB status.

Based upon a review of the attributes associated with the sample of principals interviewed, SES appears to be more closely tied to a school's "Needs Improvement" status than academic achievement. Of the 17 schools that do not have to contend with NCLB sanctions 13 are located in high SES communities and four are low SES (Table 3). In contrast, of the 8 schools designated as SINI, six are low SES schools and two are high SES (Table 4). The disparity is not as pronounced when comparing achievement levels. Among the schools not in SINI (Table 3), there are about the same number of schools low and high achievement status; whereas, of those in SINI (Table 4) five are lower achieving and three are higher. Even when looking at the marginal schools within the sample, the effect of SES is clear. All six of the high SES and higher achieving schools were not SINI as opposed to the one low SES and lower achieving school.

Table 3

Schools Not in "Needs Improvement" Status (Years 0 and 1)

		Achievement		
		Lower	Higher	Total SES
SES	Low	1	3	4
	High	7	6	13
	Total Achievement	8	9	

Table 4

Schools in "Needs Improvement" Status (Years 3 – 7)

		Achievement		
		Lower	Higher	Total SES
SES	Low	3	3	6
	High	2	0	2
	Total Achievement	5	3	

Cross-case comparison: Achievement

The first of the study's comparative research questions examines the variation of accountability experiences according to the academic performance of the school. The achievement level attribute used in the sampling matrix compares a school's actual performance to the expected performance; therefore, a school may have test scores that seem relatively high, but are still be lower than those of most schools with a similar student body. Consequently, an analysis of the interviews along this dimension suggests different conceptions of accountability among principals in schools with different achievement levels (Figure 6). Most notably, principals in lower performing schools report that they attend to more external sources of accountability than those in higher performing schools who are almost exclusively driven by an internal accountability mechanism.
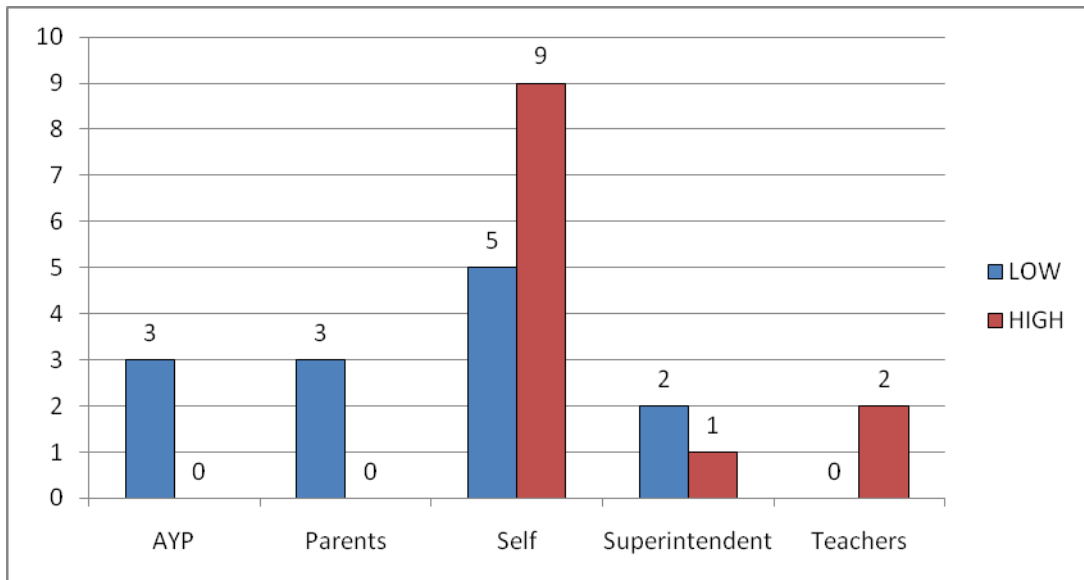
Figure 6. "Most Accountable" sources discussed during interview according to the expected achievement of the school

About twice as many principals from higher performing schools identify themselves as the greatest source of accountability and two participants feel obligated to teachers. The one outlier among the higher performing felt the greatest pressure from his superintendent. Conversely, the distribution of accountability sources among principals in the opposing category suggests that lower achievement may lead to increased attention to outside sources of pressure. Although there are five principals in lower performing schools participants who feel most accountable to their own conscience, the remaining eight principals are focused on accountability to others via political or bureaucratic mechanisms.

Cross-case comparison: SES

The second comparative research question explores the differing accountability conceptions according to the SES of the school. When examined along this dimension, the responses once again suggest clear patterns among the principals' conceptions of

accountability. The most prominent finding is in the consistency of responses among

principals in low SES schools who almost all identify themselves as the greatest source of

accountability compared to the wider distribution of sources among high SES schools

(Figure 7).
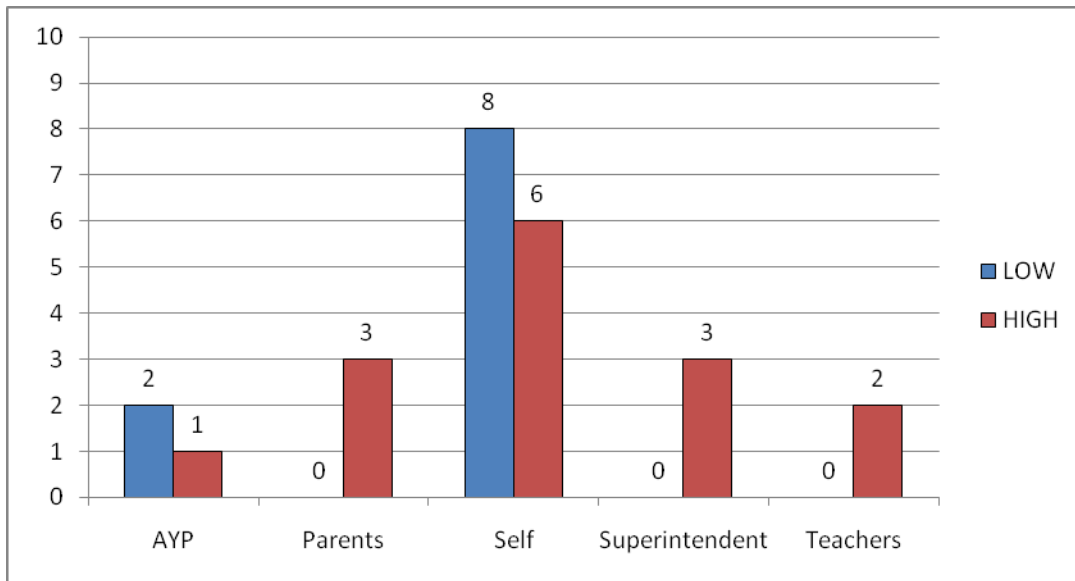
Figure 7. "Most Accountable" sources discussed during interview according to SES of
school

Although most low SES principals view themselves as the greatest source of

accountability, the two outliers in this category underscore the strong external influence

of political accountability systems when sanctions are imposed upon schools in high

poverty communities. Principal 11101 feels a great amount of pressure and frustration

trying to provide a quality education to students in his school in the face of the many

social and political obstacles in his way.

> Well it could weigh you down. You know you can get the sense that
> you're trying everything possible. You're trying to make changes in
> youngsters' attitude and behavior in school. You're trying to teach
> positive lessons to get youngsters to climb over the hump and everything
> that you do just doesn't work and that could be very frustrating and very
> debilitating.

The constant attention paid to adhering to the NCLB sanctions makes it near impossible to ignore.

In contrast, principals in the 15 high SES schools offer a greater variation in their conceptions. Moral accountability is strong for eight principals who are driven to respond to themselves or their teachers while the other seven feel greater pressure to respond to an external source of political or bureaucratic accountability

Accountability profile

Conceptions of accountability among the middle school principals in the study may be grouped in two broad categories. The first consists of those principals who identify themselves as the greatest source of accountability. This group of 14 principals clearly represents the majority of principals interviewed. The other group is comprised of the remaining 11 principals who report to an external source of accountability. A review of the intersection of SINI status, achievement, and SES attributes may provides greater insight into why external sources sometimes superseded accountability to self and further creates a profile of common characteristics that are associated with each source of accountability (Table 5). It is important to note that due to the small size of the sample the purpose of the following descriptions is to propose hypotheses; rather than assert definitive relationships. The study merely suggests a possible relationship between the contexts described and the greatest source of accountability identified by the participants in the study.

Table 5

Primary Source of Accountability Profile

Source	Needs Improvement Status	Achievement	SES
NCLB	3/3 in Status	3/3 Low	2/3 Low
Public	1/3 in Status	3/3 Low	3/3 High
Superintendent	0/3 in Status	2/3 Low	3/3 High
Educators	0/2 in Status	2/2 High	2/2 High
Self	4/14 in Status	9/14 High	8/14 Low

Principals who feel most accountable to NCLB are subject to many external forces that are commonly associated with schools struggling to make AYP. First, all of the schools are in various stages of SINI status and they are required to adhere to the applicable sanctions. In addition, their lower academic performance suggests that they cannot ignore the need to attend to NCLB if they are to reach the benchmarks and shed the SINI label. The low SES of schools also brings its own challenges to achieving AYP that make this source of accountability very prominent for these principals.

Principals who report the public as their greatest source of accountability share one common attribute those who identify NCLB – lower achievement. Although they are not defined by SINI, the schools appear to struggle with raising the level of academic achievement. The difference for these principals comes from the pressure they feel as a result of working in a high SES community. In their experiences, they appear to attend to the public perception of the school and account for their performance as a quality school. Consequently, regardless of the NCLB label, the public's opinion may becomes a great source of pressure when the performance does not meet the expectations of the community.

Similarly, when NCLB status is not an influential factor, the source of accountability can lie elsewhere when schools are characterized by lower achievement and high SES. If the greatest source of pressure does not come directly from the public, principals are susceptible to the pressure they feel from their superintendent to improve academic performance. Although the high SES of the community may also be a source of pressure, it does not exert as much influence as the superintendent for these principals. The exception in this category is the principal in the higher performing school, where the focus on the superintendent is a direct response to a specific and recent incident involving the principal. Had it not been for the negative event, there is no indication that the superintendent would have been as prominent a source of accountability.

Accountability to other educators is similarly characterized by common attributes. These principals work in high SES and performing schools that have met AYP. Rather than being driven by the fear of sanctions, these principals are seem intrinsically motivated to be accountable to their teachers. As the lead member of the professional community within the school, these principals believe it is their responsibility to fulfill their administrative obligations so that their teachers can be fully supported in carrying out their instructional duties in the classroom. Without feeling the external pressure to respond to a SINI status or correct low student achievement, the principals feel empowered to determine the path of success for their school.

The profile associated with principals in the accountability to self category suggest that they do not feel an overwhelming amount of pressure to respond to external forces. Principals in this category are less likely to come from schools that worry about SINI pressures. Furthermore, most of the schools are high achieving which may help to

ameliorate any challenges present in low SES contexts and afford them the ability to determine their own accountability pressure. However, in the cases where schools are lower achieving and/or SES as well as a SINI, the basin of attraction theory may provide some insight as to why NCLB is not a more prominent source of accountability. In light of the theory, these principals may feel so far removed from the fear of sanctions either because nothing negative has ever been done to them or because they may think that there is nothing they can do to remedy the situation as the root cause of the problem may reside beyond their sphere of influence. In either scenario, there is not a pressure to respond to any source greater than their own conscience. Consequently, principals characterized by this accountability profile use their personal accountability help them manage the world around them.

School leaders perceive pressure from a variety of sources and for a variety of reasons. Although they all identified student-centered priorities, the degree of pressure they feel from external forces shape where they feel the greatest source of accountability and ultimately how they respond. The next section examines the leadership practices that principals employ to manage the various calls for accountability.

Leadership Responses to Accountability

The power of accountability resides in the ability to motivate principals to meet the expectations of those to whom they feel accountable. Therefore, the final component of the conceptual framework explores the leadership practices that principals describe as their response to the accountability sources they perceive. The participants' descriptions

of their leadership practices are intended to offer additional insight into the perception of the 'who' or 'what' they truly felt most accountable. Are their actions indicative of responses to the primary source of accountability they describe or do they respond to something or someone else? Once again, the small sample size does not allow for any definitive correlation between the sources of accountability and accompanying practices, but the table illustrates possible relationships.

The leadership practices discussed are based upon the principals' responses to the interview questions that addressed the subject directly. In particular, the question, "How do you respond to this form of accountability?" and the subsequent probes and questions that followed focused the interview on what actions principals take to manage accountability pressures.

In general, the responses do not always follow as logically from the accountability source as expected. Some of the responses cut across accountabilities while others did not appear to directly respond to the primary sources of pressure identified by the participant. The final section of this chapter examines the accountability leadership practices described in response to being held accountable to self, the public, other educators, administrative superiors, and politics (Table 6).

Table 6

Leadership Responses to Accountability

Primary Source of Accountability	Leadership Response
Self	Be visible
	Communicate effectively
	Organize tasks
	Empower Students
	Focus on instructional supports
Others	
• Educators	Promote collaboration
	Focus on instructional supports
• NCLB	Promote collaboration
	Focus on instructional supports
• Public	Communicate effectively
	Hire and retain quality staff
• Superintendent	Follow orders

Accountability to Self

Principals who report being held most accountable to their own conscience describe a variety of leadership practices that emphasize their involvement and visibility within the school as well as their skills in management and instructional leadership. The emphasis for these principals is to behave in a way that reaffirms their commitment to students by establishing a culture and environment that is safe, secure, and supports students' needs.

Visibility. Being a visible presence in the school appears to be a prominent theme among internally motivated principals. They value the opportunity to see what is going on in their hallways and classrooms first-hand. In keeping with the accountability-to-self

theme, Principal 12102 makes a conscious effort to interact with his students to ensure

that their experience in his school is meaningful.

> Again, I wish I could do more. The obvious thing would be to go into the classrooms and see what's going on and see that the vision is being carried out, the idea that kids are learning. They are having fun. They are proactive… and not just sitting there regurgitating stuff back to the teacher or giving the teacher what he or she thinks is right. They have to be involved in giving their own ideas. So yeah, naturally… you're supposed to be out in the hallways.

His presence in the classrooms helps him gauge his efforts as the school leader to set a

positive tone for learning. Principal 22120 also attempts to instill a similar sentiment

among his students. His visibility and interaction with the students reinforces his

commitment in his own mind.

> You walk through the halls, it may feel like the typical middle school, may not look like the typical middle school at all times, but you'll see elements of that openness. You'll see children respect me. Children know that when I'm serious then they get anxious, but then probably 99 out of 100 kids that walk by want to shake my hand. Kids give you a hug. They know about you personally. I think it's important for them to see you as a human being. I bring my family in. My three-year old son will come in and walk the halls and the kids know his name. They need to know who you are. They need to be able to make those personal connections with you.

Principal 12212 satisfies her student-centered priorities by getting to know her students

on a personal level. Her goal is to make sure that she knows her students and they know

her.

> I think one of the best testimonies to that is I had 8th grade student, come and say one day, "You are everywhere." I go, "You know what? You could not say a better thing to me."… I think the kids and the staff realize I do not do it because it is big brother watching either. It is just that they know I just want to get to know them. Just the other day… I called the little boy by name, and he looked at me and he goes, "How do you know my name?" "That's my job," I said. I would not be in any other profession if I did not want to know kids. And then I knew something about what he like to do and he said, "Wow, you really do know me," so that is the kind of thing that I think is a priority.

The physical presence and social interactions foster a welcoming atmosphere while instilling a sense of order and safety that many principals identify as a priority in their work.

Principal 11214 is very conscious of how being visible attends to the safety of the students and the security of the school. "Young people in this building understand that I am an ultimate disciplinarian and will tolerate nothing but them going to classes and doing what they are to do. I take nothing from those young people, zero tolerance." She believes students need to know that the administration is around all the time not simply when something bad happens.

> They know when I'm in the halls. The kids are completely different. You
> have to be visible and even though I don't… impose myself on my
> teachers, you have to be visible to be positive to see the good things
> because when you are disciplining all the time, you're doing things that
> have to deal with negative things which comes a lot, yet you never get to
> see anything positive.

School leaders communicate a similar message to their staff through frequent visits to classrooms.

Whether through informal walkthroughs or more formal observations and evaluations, principals want to see authentic teaching and learning taking place. Principals like Principal 12102 do not want to see a staged lesson; rather, they wish to see real teaching taking place so that they can respond with meaningful feedback to improve instruction.

> I don't tell teachers ahead of time when I'm coming in. I have other
> people tell them. To me it becomes even more artificial. People will use
> that system and say, "Well, if they're not good then and they know you're
> coming in." So that's one thing. But personally as a teacher, I always felt
> more relaxed when I didn't know you were coming in. If I knew you were

> coming then I would be even more nervous the night before. So I really
> want to see the real thing.

Principal 11118 uses his walkthroughs to follow up on whether his high standards for quality student engagement are being met.

> And the way I get that done… is that I walk in and out of classrooms.
> And my teachers know that I'm not going to embarrass anybody, but they
> also know that I have expectations. See -- it's all about expectations!
> Everything's about expectations. Every teacher knows you have to have a
> "Do now" or a problem of the day, or -- they have to have something to
> start the class. We don't want to waste time -- time is too precious… I
> want to see a variety of activities. I don't care how much noise there is as
> long as kids are engaged and learning.

School leaders used their active presence in the school as a way to inspect the expectations of their staff and themselves.

Communication. Principals who attend to their own accountability also report using verbal communication to gather feedback from their constituents. Principal 12102 uses his open communication with his staff an important means of building a positive rapport with his teachers while ensuring he receives honest feedback on his performance as the school leader. "I meet with them every other week to find out what's going on? Not now, but normally I have open-door policy. I don't like criticism. I don't know who does, but I want to know... I'm always looking to improve." He also uses a monthly principal-parent roundtable to engage his community in a dialogue where he can share good news and gather suggestions for ways that the school can improve. More formal option are also used to promote positive communication.

Committees are used to provide structured and sometimes strategic opportunities for input. Principal 22120 maked use of his community task force to explore the idea of implementing an International Baccalaureate program in the school.

> Your strongest critics have to be your closest allies at times. And you engage those folks in process. When there's task forces and committees that have to be formed you make sure they're on it. You make sure they're well-informed. You communicate well with them so there's never a surprise that hits the community. Any time there's a change or something critical that's gonna be disseminated from the school you make sure that you're educating folks along the way so there's never a shock.

Principal 22121 does not limit his solicitation of feedback to the adults. He creates ad hoc committees to get input from students on issues that are of concern to them so that he stays closely onnected to their. In order to monitor their personal accountability, school leaders often rely on the evaluation of those whom they serve.

Organization. Personal organization is another common area of focus among principals in this category. School leaders stressed the importance of balancing the needs of everything and everyone under their purview. Principal 21126 feels obligated to attend to matters in a reasonable amount time as a sign of respect to his constituents.

> For me I'm a well-organized person. So when I get things, I take care of them right away. When people touch base with me, I always respond in some fashion to say whether I can or I can't or I can look into it or I can't do it. I think people need to hear somebody is concerned enough to at least hear what they have to say and if there's a solution, I will do it.

School leaders accept the multiple demands placed upon them and believe it is their responsibility to somehow make it all work. Principal 12110 referrs to it as the "juggling act" that allows him to share his energy between the needs of the students and the needs of central office. Principal 21236 believes personal organization is an essential characteristic for school leaders who wish to satisfy the needs of their conscience.

> Some of my personal traits of being organized and having routines, ensuring certain disciplinary codes in the school, ensuring that there are lots of things in place help to facilitate an environment where I can use… my belief that children determine our decisions. I don't know if those other things were not in place… I don't know that you can lead with anything so I think that has to also be in place.

By taking care of the managerial items, principal have the freedom to attend to the most important matters with less distraction.

Empowering students. Principals also report practices that encourage students to have a voice in their school. In addition to participating in committees and student organizations, principals also create opportunities for them to freely express their thoughts and concerns and act upon them in a way that benefits the entire school.

Principal 21228 feels that it is her job to cultivate the leadership potential of her students "not just for themselves to have fun but, for their community. That to me is a civic responsibility. I think that's very important. And for them to grow as leaders, I think, that's very important for them." Supporting the student perspective is a practice that Principal 22120 allows to influence the "the policy and operation of the school and creating an atmosphere where everybody's tied to the student success." Principal 21236 shared an experience when she took advantage of an opportunity to channel her students' concerns into for a school-wide search for solutions.

> So I said, "I want you to write me a letter first telling me what you like about the cafeteria, then what they can do better to service you, and do it all based on recommendations…" So all the kids wrote and we got the cafeteria, because we have a privatized cafeteria, we got them to change the menu and to change us from an elementary serving to high school serving. So the kids fell like "wow, we were able to do that." So we try to empower the children.

Allowing student voices to be heard affirms the principals' efforts to create an environment that is student-centered.

Instructional Supports. In addition to attending to the social and emotional needs of students, principals shared an assortment of practices that address the academic supports they implement in their schools. Principals rely on their authority and

responsibility to provide their teachers with what they needed to be successful in the

classroom while also making decisions that directly impact the delivery of instruction.

One way principals offer instructional support is by seeking out ways to get

teachers the training and materials they need to improve the classroom experience. For

instance, Principal 21126 sees himself as the primary person responsible for coordinating

professional development and acquiring needed resources for teachers.

> I'm a firm supporter of workshops, new trends. I like to see them try
> different things… and I was always big on publicity, like, "Hey, here's
> what we're doing in our school. We got this unique little project."
> Sometimes those things outside the box will help the kid learn and that's
> where I'm accountable… If it's funding we need, I do the best I can with
> limited budgets to purchase new software, anything we might want to use
> in the classroom. I like to hear that. I investigate a lot. That's where I am
> accountable. I think I do a pretty good job in trying to get them what they
> need.

If principals are successful in doing their job, it enhances their teachers work in the

classrooms. Time is also a valuable resource principals use to support instruction.

Principals use their managerial authority to adjust student and teachers schedules

as needed. They often provide time for teachers to plan and collaborate with one another

to improve the instructional experience. Principal 11214 creates instructional support

teams and relieves them of all non-instructional responsibilities to help them stay

focused.

> So we restructured the building into small learning communities, made a
> whole new schedule and I took all the duties away from the teachers. No
> more hall duties. No more cafeteria duties. None of that, but instead they
> have small learning community duty meetings and professional
> development meetings with the coaches and their duties, there are not free
> periods or preps. They have prep along with that… in essence we gave
> the authority of instruction back to the teachers.

In some cases they rework the master schedule of their school in order to increase the instructional time for specific content areas as is the case for Principal 21135. "I shortened the periods a little bit and I cut down on home room and I cut down on lunch and passing time that then allows us 80 minutes of ELA and 80 minutes of Math." In other instances, students' needs are targeted and addressed through increased time spent involved with remedial supports intended to accelerate their learning. Principal 22120 finds ways to give his lowest achieving students the support they need.

> We have the structure of our basic skills program. The children that are deficient in language arts, only get four days a week of the supplemental instruction. The same is true for math. But if you're equally deficient in both content areas, then you get half the services in each area -- you get two days of instruction in one class and two days in the other.

Principals explore creative solutions to make the most of the limited resources they had to get the job done.

Overall, principals driven by their own conscience tend to engage in leadership practices that help them meet the academic and safety needs of their students. Although they acknowledge the demands of state assessments and other forces, they attempt to maintain a focus on improving student achievement because they believe students deserved it.

Accountability to the Public

Parents and the community also have an influence over the leadership practices of principals. While their motivation to act sometimes stems from a moral obligation to the students; it also comes from the need to deal with the political outcomes associated with not meeting performance expectations. To respond to the demands of their constituents,

school leaders employ a variety of direct and indirect strategies to address the public

perceptions of the school by managing external communication as well as by hiring and

retaining quality staff who can enhance the image of school.

Managed communication. Principals try to influence the views of their school

through their direct communication with the public. For example, Principal 12215 shares

ways she presents information to her community in order to keep them informed while

also controlling the message they receive .

> No matter how you talk about what you've done or what is accomplished
> or what a test score means, the bottom line is the bottom line. You can
> talk about the change in the cut score. You can talk about what the
> significant differences is between last year's score and this year's scores
> based on where the top was… But the bottom line is… I think initially
> they were upset and I think that we… did a good job of communicating to
> the parents what essentially it meant and what it didn't mean.

Principal 11116 understands that he is not always going please everyone; however, he

still tries to phrase things in a way that they can understand and respect.

> It's all in the delivery! It dictates how I deliver something. I mean, it's
> OK to disagree with parents. I mean, I have to make a decision every
> single day… and in every decision I make I'm peeing off somebody. I
> mean someone's gonna walk out of here unhappy, but it helps mold me
> and it disciplines my mind on how to deliver something. It's OK to
> disagree with a parent. And it's OK to tell a parent, "This is how it's
> going to be." But how I deliver it -- the tools in my toolbox -- what I'm
> gonna say -- how I'm gonna say it -- that all shapes that decision.

Principal 12106 also builds trusting relationship with his parents so that they knew he

had their child's best interests at heart. He believes, "keeping them happy does not mean

I have to lower my standards, and that is where trust comes in, and when parents trust us,

we are going to challenge your son or daughter and we are going to be there to support

them." In addition to using personal interactions to manage public expectations,

principals also focus on other ways to promote a positive image of the school.

Hire and retain quality staff. Indirectly, principals appeared to convey an image

of confidence and competence in the school through the staff whom they employ.

According to Principal 12106, he must employ the highest quality staff in order to

account for the highest level of performance in the classroom. Once his teachers are in

place he provides whatever resources and support they need to be effective so that he can

keep them as part of his staff.

> Well, my job here is to support what is going on in the classroom.
> Obviously I have hired what I believe are the best people for middle
> school. I have hired, I believe, experts at teaching middle school children.
> My job as a support, I am the support person who is going to supply
> materials. And make sure that the atmosphere of the school is friendly but
> business like. Here to handle problems that teachers cannot handle, I am
> here to make sure that classrooms have the least amount of disruption and
> at them teachers can maximize the time they have on students. I think all
> of that goes in to producing a good product.

As an area of focus, hiring and retaining strong teachers to promote quality and

excellence also means that principals make difficult decisions when their staff do perform

at high levels. According to Principal 12215, "when you know deep inside they just don't

have what it is you're looking for, it's not a good fit. And because we had so many non-

tenured, it allowed us to let those people find other places that were a better fit and it

made us a stronger staff." With a stronger staff, the principals improve their ability to

create a quality product to satisfy the demands of the consumers.

Principals use direct and indirect leadership practices to manage the public's

perception of the school. Direct communication efforts focus on persuading parents to be

partners in education while providing them with information to help shape what they may

see or hear. Indirectly, principals focus on building a strong instructional staff as a way to

foster an image of quality and excellence. In the end, the proof of their efforts is

measured by the feedback they receive from the public. According to Principal 12106,

> I can sleep well at night knowing that the parents will say to me, "This is a good school." And if I could ask them why, they will tell me some of the things I want to hear, the teachers are great, the atmosphere is great, and way down on that list somewhere, for most parents is… "My kids are having a great experience,"... That is where I get the most rewards, I believe.

Accountability to Other Educators

Leadership practices associated with accountability to other educators involves team-oriented behaviors that suggest a collaborative response to meeting the needs of students. The principals connect themselves with other professionals who depend on one another to get their respective jobs done. Whether they view themselves as accountable to educators within the school or throughout the district, principals' leadership practices are intended to meet their obligations as part of an educational team.

Promote collaboration. To manage accountability to other educators, principals may concentrate much of their efforts on collaboration and communication with the other members of the instructional team. In order to satisfy the accountability to her sending and receiving schools, Principal 21232 believes that it is essential to learn more about the students entering her school by speaking with the other principals frequently. Once in her school, she uses the knowledge to target the support for her students.

> You get a greater understanding of who those struggling students are before they even hit here because you've had that relationship and built that relationship with the elementary schools so you know who those at risk students are. You know where their struggling and you know why their struggling…
>
> So when you bring them into the middle school and you look at your various teams that you have teaching … You know the different teaching styles of those teams and you can relate those teaching styles and those personalities of those teachers to the struggling students and hopefully

place them appropriately because those teachers would understand what that child needs are and can proceed from there. We also include my guidance counselors with my assistant principals, and myself so we each take a grade level.

Similarly, Principal 22123 focuses his practices on developing a team culture among his staff. He also uses teams of staff and students, which includes himself, in order to increase personalization and target assistance for students when needed. Whenever possible, he promotes his involvement as a member of the team by modeling his expectations.

> Anything that I do as far as accountability with teachers is I model everything… so whether that has to do with assessment, I model how to assess, but it also has to do with cooperative teaching and collaborative teaching... parent interviews as far as conferences are concerned, I actually model all of that for staff. So it's better than a top-down approach right? I don't believe in the top-down approach. That's not my style and they understand that.

Principal 22131 also believes in fostering a culture of mutual support and accountability. and describes his role on the team as less authoritative and more facilitative in order to provide the necessary resources. In doing so, Principal 22131 hopes that it fosters a collaborative atmosphere with his staff.

> If I can help them in any way I generally do. If I have to bend rules here or there to help them achieve a goal I am willing to do that… I think if teachers are comfortable doing what they are doing, and knowing that big brother is helping rather than just watching. I think it makes them more effective. If they come to me with a request to attend a workshop, it is very rarely denied. If they come to me with a request for an assembly or a program -- very rarely denied. Many of them do team PIPs with professional improvement plans and that is at my prompting… so that they are working together and you are gleaning information from one another.

A team orientation lead by the principal promotes a collective responsibility among staff that makes everyone's job equally important. As Principal 22123 states, "It's not just holding language arts teachers, because it happens to be the language arts test,

accountable. It's actually involving everyone in the building kind of being on the same page to know if we're moving forward and progress with that particular grade level moving to the next so we don't lose sight of that."

Instructional supports. The collaborative culture principals promote support the conditions necessary to target academic needs and enhance the delivery of instruction. Principal 22123 uses action plans with his staff to initiate activities that directly address areas of weakness in Language Arts Literacy and Mathematics as identified through the examination of state assessment data. Likewise, Principal 21232 looks at data with her instructional team to target instructional supports through professional development. In her case, she not only facilitates meetings with her staff, but she also works with the master schedule to allow common planning time for teachers to come together to share their knowledge and practices.

> We ran a lot of in house staff development to address those weak areas and so a lot of my staff will come forth with their expertise and run them because we are a small learning community school. Each teacher has a block of time everyday which I can put a staff development component in if I need too. What we do is currently we do Tuesdays and Thursdays for staff development duties here and we address different areas that we feel a need to be supported in order for student achievement to increase… I've been able to do that. And so, there's been sustained staff development that's addressed any area of need that we had in terms of state testing or student achievement.

It is important to these principals that their teachers see them actively involved in the efforts to support student achievement.

Principals who believe that they are held accountable to other educators do not rely on top-down tactics; rather, they believe that their active collaboration with other educators is vital to the success of their students. Principal 22131 believes, "It is kind of

contagious, teachers see one another succeeding or meeting with successful… or with a

certain kid that might have been a problem in the past… they stumble on the right thing,

or we brainstorm and we come up with a plan. It spreads to the building."

Accountability to Superiors

Principals who feel most held accountable to their superintendents describe their

resultant leadership practices as simply responding to the directives they receive from

their superiors. Whether they are motivated to act because they wish to or because they

seem to feel they have to, the principals generally engage in behaviors that are intended

to satisfy the expectations of the line authority.

Follow orders. Accountability to the superintendent generally resulted in

principals simply doing what they are told. Principal 12105 claims to have regular

communication with the superintendent in order to make sure he understands what is

expected of him so that he can "work like crazy to fulfill those obligations, whether it be

a directive to improve test scores, a directive to assess data of discipline or data of

academic performance. I just find out what that is and work to achieve that." Once he

knows what has to be done, he mobilizes the necessary staff and resources to carry out

the task.

> I'll assess what the needs are at that point, and then -- I have the luxury of
> having the vice principal over there. So, typically I'll meet with whatever
> team that I have in place -- you know, guidance, secretaries -- depending
> on what the action is -- um, gather input and develop an action plan to
> achieve whatever, you know, is set forth to achieve. I usually like to grab
> input from, team members, colleagues, things like that, to help satisfy
> whatever those requirements are.

If he is successful in his efforts, then his superintendent is happy. Principal 12209 also believes she has to respond to the priorities set by the superintendent. In her mind, she does whatever is necessary to make sure that the superintendent doesn't have to worry about it.

As a result of a specific incident involving the superintendent, Principal 22119 just wants to stay on his boss's good side. He behaviors are consistent with the practices and protocols of the district and he always keeps the superintendent informed. No matter what, Principal 22119 takes whatever is given to him by the superintendent. "I take care of 'NJ Smart' for the district. I am the district data manager for the three different schools and student administrative software system. I'm the Athletic Director. I do lunch duty every day because we don't have enough people in the master schedule to do that." Regardless of the job, he does it because he is told to do so, but unfortunately, he still feels that it does not meet his superintendents' expectation.

Whether they feel inspired to act by their superior or forced to do so, principals who respond to the pressures placed upon them by their superiors describe reactive behaviors that meet the whim, will, or priorities of their superintendent even if they disagree with them.

Accountability to Politics

The participants who are motivated by the demands of NCLB report strategies that are similar to those mentioned by other school leaders in the study. The practices that are described indicate that school leaders attend to the culture of collaboration and targeting instructional supports.

Promote collaboration. Promoting a collaborative environment appears to be one strategy used to create a climate of shared responsibility. By including others in the problem-solving school leaders who feel accountable to NCLB want to instill a shared commitment to the task of improving test scores. Principal 11101 wants to build better partnerships with teachers and parents in order to receive their active support and involvement. "Well I think the way to respond to it is to communicate with staff, communicate with parents and try and create a stronger bond between home and school, stress the importance of youngsters making a commitment to learning…" He also tries to empower his teachers to see themselves as agents of change rather than passive recipients of the status quo. He actively engages them in experiences that encourages success and fosters a communal atmosphere.

> Well once again, communicating with individuals and showing that it can be successful by identifying teachers who are very good and using them as role models. Having teachers teach demonstration lessons and have other teachers view those demonstration lessons and participate in those demonstration lessons. Have teachers meet with and brainstorm, dialogue, case conference in an effort to see what works and what's the best mode of operations in terms of successfully assisting youngsters.

Principal 11103 uses teacher leaders, in his case the school facilitator, to share practices and offer peer support among staff members without it feeling like it is an administrative directive.

> We increased opportunities for peer observation. We set up coaching and feedback sessions where the facilitator would walk through with me. We would see the same thing, have discussion, we debrief about what we saw and then create time for the teacher [facilitator] to then meet with that person so it's not an 'I gotcha'. The administrator is not really talking to the support staff member. They would put together goals or a plan for that teacher with the things that we saw were going well, but some things they needed to work on with some suggestions for improvement.

Despite the negative perceptions associated with being labeled as a SINI, these principals try to promote a climate that brings everyone together to support the attainment of one common goal – increase student achievement.

Instructional supports. In their attempts to respond to the demand for improved test scores, principals may also implement programs that target specific skills and students as identified through poor performance on state assessments. Some focus on remedial efforts to increase the proficiency rates of their lowest performing students. Principal 11103 implements specific programs to improve overall literacy in his school such as 6+1 Trait Writing and Read 180. Sometimes, the efforts were more targeted. For instance, when Principal 11113 discovered that he even though the school did not meet the AYP benchmark; they did meet 40 out of the 41 indicators necessary. So he pinpointed the content area and student population that missed the target and focused his attention directly on them.

> And, the thing I'm the most proud of is that for three years running we had developed programs where the low income population, which -- as you know -- is the hardest group to show improvement -- reduced the failure rate on the mathematics portion of the standardized test by forty three percent, and maintained it over three years.

Consequently, he pours his efforts into increasing the amount of remedial instruction his students receives. Basic skills programs already exist in his school, so all he has to do is rework the master schedule so that the students who need it most receive it more often.

> So I just looked at it, and I said, "Well, we gotta improve our Basic Skills program." The only way to do that is to have a Basic Skills class that's taught five days a week -- not, you know, first period on a Monday, and then second period on a Friday! Because that doesn't provide consistency in education. So I had to figure out a way to get the Basic Skills to do that. So all I did was a simple change -- I made it -- instead of having two days a week for World Language in sixth and three in seventh, I said, "Well, why don't we just make it two and a half and two and a half!"

> Then you had it very easy -- you have quarter and semester classes, you
> can tie it in, you make five days a week.

Coupled with efforts to improve test scores principals also take part in a balancing act of trying not to teach to the test.

Principal 11101 tries to resist the urge to focus on test preparation. He fears that a test preparation focus will cause him to lose sight of the other aspects of learning and socializing that he feels are important for students.

> I think where the conflict might come in that there is a tendency to teach
> towards the test. You're so focused on doing well on the exam that you
> forget about the individual student and I think that a conflict might exist in
> the end that you're putting all of your eggs in one basket, you're doing
> everything you possibly can do to make sure that this youngster does well
> on the test but you're not looking at those other tangible things that a
> youngster needs to be successful in life.

The struggle that he described was solved by his conscious efforts not to exclusively teach to the test. "I think what you try and do is you try to do both. You try to combine those efforts, you try through teaching the whole child, hoping that that teaching will help that youngster to be successful on the state tests."

The practices employed by principals who are motivated to act by political pressures like NCLB represent different ends of a spectrum. On the more general end, school leaders try to enhance the environment so that it exudes a culture of success and collaboration among the school community. Then more specifically, they attempt to implement programs that specifically targets the content and performance needs of their students as dictated by the state assessments.

The findings presented in this chapter responded directly to the research questions that underpinned this exploration. Based upon the responses provided by the principals in the study, most of them felt held accountable to themselves first and foremost. The accountability profiles presented (Table 4) show that these principals are less likely to come from schools that have to worry about SINI pressures while achievement and SES are less likely to be influential forces; therefore, they use their own conscience to determine how to manage the pressures around them. Conversely, the principals who identify external accountabilities are in less advantageous situations with regard to student achievement, SES, AYP status and/or the intrusion of some specific source of accountability which results in the great influence over to whom/what they feel most accountable.

The next chapter discusses the overall findings related to principal leadership and accountability, describes the impact the study has on practice, and offers ways to refine future research to explore the concepts further.

CHAPTER V

Discussion

School leaders assume a great responsibility when overseeing the education of children. In the course of carrying out this important leadership task, principals face a myriad of pressures that attempt to exert influence over them and hold them accountable for their actions. Some of these forces prove to be stronger than others and the reasons vary for each school leader. The current study of 25 New Jersey middle school principals from different SES and performance contexts offers insight into understanding the influences, perceptions, and practices associated with accountability and education leadership.

The final chapter of this endeavor relates the experiences of the phenomenological inquiry with the scholarly literature in order to further connect the theory with the practice. Limitations of the current study are addressed and recommendations for future research are made so that there can be a better understanding about the intersection of leadership and accountability in education. The following section begins with an overview of the findings using the framework that underpinned the study (Figure 1).

Forces Influencing Accountability

There are a host of forces that potentially influence the perceptions and behaviors of school leaders. An accountability tug-of-war ensues when these forces pull principals in different directions. Sometimes the forces pull on the same side as the principals aligning with their beliefs, values, and priorities. Other times the forces pull against them and try to sway their actions and decisions. The strength of the forces varies in every situation so the outcome of the struggle may differ for each principal. Regardless, principals must make sense of their world around them in light of these forces. Beginning with an understanding of their priorities and beliefs, the principals in this study offer insight into what these pressures mean for each of them.

Internal Forces

Principals possess specific values and beliefs about their role as a school leader (Hoy & Miskell, 2001; Kelly et al., 2002; Leithwood, Steinbach, and Jantzi 2002) which impacts how they carry out their jobs. All principals in the study describe themselves as student-centered and all maintain strong priorities as school leaders to attend to the needs of the students for whom they were responsible. First is their focus on academics. Principals describe a strong focus on ensuring that their students are able to learn in ways that meet their needs and maximize their potential. They promote high levels of student engagement and wish to empower them to do their personal best. Student performance on state assessments is one factor considered by principals when conceptualizing student academics; however, in general, principals do not want to be preoccupied by standardized tests.

Safety and personal well-being is the other student-centered priority for

principals. The participants emphasize the notion that a supportive school environment is

a precursor to effective teaching and learning. As the leaders of the building, principals

report taking on the responsibility of working with the entire school community to create

an atmosphere that is safe, nurturing, and responsive to the needs of the students.

In addition to their student-centered values, principals also express particular beliefs

about the perceived alignment of their priorities with those of their constituents.

Principals generally feel supported by their local school community. They believe their

parents, teachers, and even boards of education are equally vested in supporting students'

needs. On the other hand, school leaders do not feel the same way about politicians.

Whether defined as local, state, or federal officials, most of the principals view the broad

category of politicians as being out of touch with the needs of schools and more

concerned with the electorate than with improving educational opportunities. When

describing those who do not align with their priorities, principals suggest that they are

motivated by self interests more than the interest of students.

External Forces

Principals' perceptions and behaviors are also subject to the influence of

contextual forces around them (Diamond and Spillane, 2004; Spillane et al., 2002; Brown

and Clift, 2010). The major sources of external influence revealed in the study appears to

relate to the SES and performance dimensions used to identify the sample.

Based upon the sampling strategy employed, participants work in schools that vary

according to their expected performance on state assessments as well as the SES of the

community where the school is located. There are inferred challenges and opportunities associated with educating students in each setting (Harris, 2007) which requires principals to adjust their perceptions and behaviors in order to accommodate the needs dictated by their circumstances.

Somewhat related to the performance of the school, principals may also contend with being labeled as a successful or failing school based upon the performance on state assessments measured against the AYP benchmark target. Consequently, each of the schools represented in the study occupy a place along the school improvement continuum ranging from not being identified as a SINI to being considered a school that must be restructured. Those who are identified as a SINI must also manage the corrective sanctions imposed upon them. A comparison of sampling attributes with the status of the school suggests a possible relationship among the schools in the study. When examining the distribution of schools along the SINI continuum based upon the SES dimension, much fewer high SES schools are identified as in need of improvement which means that the principals in this category are less likely than their low SES counterparts to have to manage any sanctions associated with NCLB. Looking at the same distribution based upon the achievement levels, there does not appear to be any strong relationship among lower and higher achieving schools sampled and SINI status.

Other external forces that may influence principals' perceptions of accountability are situation-specific scenarios. For instance, staff turnover in some schools provide principals with the opportunities and challenges to hire and train new staff. Similarly, a change in the superintendent position in a school district may result in positive experience for one principal compared to unwelcome change for another. There are also

cases where the principal resides in the town or has children attending the school where they work. These special scenarios are not tied to any particular attribute; however, they may create or diminish a source of pressure for principals.

In general, the interview questions and sampling strategy used for the study elicited responses from principals that reveal the variety of forces that color their conceptions of accountability and responsive leadership behaviors.

Middle School Principals' Conceptions of Accountability

There are multiple applications and understandings of the term accountability when placed in an educational context (Newman et al., 1997; Abelman et al., 1999; Kelly, 1999, Watson & Supovitz, 2001; Firestone and Shipps, 2005; Ableman et al., 1999; Leithwood, 2001; Adams and Kirst, 1999). The current study posits that, in practice, various forms of accountability exist simultaneously attempting to influence the perceptions and behaviors of principals. Over the last few decades external sources of accountability have increased and become stronger forces in public education. Despite the prevalence of these forces, accountability to self remains most prominent among the middle school principals in this study.

Accountability to Self

Motivated by personal standards and expectations, most principals hold themselves accountable to their conscience. It is through their attention to this source of accountability that 14 out of 25 principals maintain their focus on students. Principals reflect on their practice and make adjustments according to the changing needs of the job

while using their conscience as a guide. The accountability mechanism for those who are accountable to their conscience takes place at the end of each day as they judge their performance to determine whether they have done their best to meet the needs of students.

For many, the academic achievement of the school reduced much of the external pressure to perform in a way that ran contrary to their values and beliefs. With only one exception, the principals who identify with accountability-to-self work in higher achieving schools and/or they were in schools that were not subject to NCLB sanctions. The sole outlier was the principal who worked in a lower performing and low SES school. Despite being in the most advanced level of school improvement status, she still feels most accountable to herself. However, her school's SINI status may have been so advanced and the achievement level may have been too far out of reach of the AYP target for this principal to be influenced by central policy mandates (Brown and Clift, 2010).

The impetus for this source of accountability cannot be narrowed down to a single attribute as this belief cut across SES and achievement dimensions as well as being shared among schools all along the improvement continuum. However, the findings of this study suggest that performance and SES may be associated with those middle school principals who are most accountable to their conscience. When taking into consideration performance, principals in higher achieving schools are almost exclusively focused on internal sources of accountability with 9 of the 11 principals referred to their own conscience (Figure 6). Principals in low SES schools maintain a similarly narrow focus with 8 out of the 10 principals in this category identifying themselves as the greatest source of accountability (Figure 7).

Accountability to Others

The phenomenological inquiry approach of the study allows for insight into the principals' perspective about why they feel obligated to certain sources of accountability over others. Although most of the participants identify their own conscience as their primary source of accountability, 11 of the 25 principals feel most accountable to other sources. Once again, the motivation for each may be inferred for many of principals based upon their interviews and the external forces connected to their specific situations. Six principals describe external sources of political and bureaucratic of accountability.

The three principals who express the strongest feelings of accountability to AYP/NCLB are also those who are at the school improvement stages that require corrective action and restructuring plans; therefore, the accountability mechanism for them is both intense and immediate. They are at a point where meeting the AYP target is a central focus that is within their reach (Brown and Clift, 2010).

The three principals for whom the superintendent was the greatest source of accountability are not schools in need of improvement; however, the superintendents in each of the districts are seen as strong influences, either positive or negative. Principals' attention to political and bureaucratic sources of accountability appear to be motivated by external forces that are strongly tied to their employment. Unlike other sources of accountability, if they do not meet their accountability expectations, then they jeopardize their ability to keep the same job.

When parents are the greatest source of accountability for three of the principals, the motivation appears to be connected to the involvement of their high SES

communities. These principals feel compelled to maintain a positive image of the school. This is particularly true for the principal who lives in the same town where he works. Although the community represents an external source of accountability, there still may be an internal motivation behind some principals' stories that satisfies their obligation to fulfill their student-centered priorities.

Then there are two principals who believe they are accountable to their teachers. As principals of higher achieving schools not in need of improvement, they do not identify their conscience as their greatest source of accountability; rather, they describe their perceptions in terms of fulfilling their obligations as members of an educational team. Upon closer examination, although identified as a source of pressure by these principals, teachers may be more aligned to what principals feel accountable *for* than *to whom* they feel most accountable. Since teachers are formally accountable to principals, the obligation to teachers appears to come less from sanctions for not meeting their expectations. Instead, principals report that they are more driven by an internal compulsion to provide the support necessary to meet their teachers' needs and improve the instructional experience for students.

The study confirms that principals are aware of the multiple pressures that are placed on them; however, the intensity with which they are felt can vary according to their specific context. For the majority of the principals, internally generated conceptions of accountability are most salient to principals even in the presence of other pressures.

Accountability Leadership Practices

Principals describe a variety of practices in response to the pressures they perceived around them. However, the practices do not always appear to be directly connected to each primary source of accountability as expected. In many cases, the leadership behaviors cut across SES, achievement, and conceptions of accountability which suggests that their practices may reflect attention to other sources of accountability beyond the most salient one they identify. In the absence of prescriptive sanctions dictated by the accountability source, principals select their own means for achieving the desired outcomes. With the exception of those who are most accountable to their superintendent, principals respond to calls for accountability by focusing on practices that promote a positive school image and culture and target instructional supports.

Collaboration and Communication

Principals are very attentive to the image and culture of their schools. As a result, they actively engage in practices that attempt to engender a positive feeling among all members of the school community including staff, students, and parents. The school leaders in the study do not claim to assume an authoritative role; rather, their actions adhere to a belief that engages all stakeholders as a crucial response to the perceived demands for accountability. Promoting open communication with and among their staff is one way that many principals bring people together to develop a shared sense of responsibility. Empowering their constituency is another approach that several school leaders use to engage students, staff, and the community to take ownership and control of coming up with a solution. Through their visible presence and proactive communication,

principals model active participation in the school so that others can see the commitment of the school leader and follow along.

Focus on Instructional Supports

Principals work with the tools and resources they have at their disposal to focus on instructional supports. Whenever possible, some use personnel in their own building to provide targeted support to meet students' needs by matching groups of educators with groups of students. Many instructional leaders state that they believe in professional growth and rely a lot on staff development. peer modeling, and coaching to implement their instructional initiatives. Although not identified by many as a primary source of accountability, it is clear that most school leaders are cognizant of the role of NCLB in their work; therefore, many invest fiscal, temporal, and human resources in the development of remedial programs that aim at supporting the academic needs of students who need it the most based upon performance on state assessment. Likewise, several principals refer to making adjustments to the master schedule in order to provide time for collaboration as well as increasing instructional time for content that is covered by the state assessments. Overall, most principals use whatever means they can to target instructional supports for teachers or students in order to improve academic outcomes.

Follow Orders

The outliers among the participants are those whose superintendents are the most salient source of accountability. For these select principals, their practices directly respond to the demands and expectations of their superiors. They take orders from their

superintendent either because they align with their own values and beliefs or because they feel that they have no other choice but to adhere to the formal top-down authoritative structure of the district.

Implications for Practice

The lessons learned from this study provide insights that can inform larger discussions regarding the development of school reform initiatives at the local, state, and federal levels. In their words, most principals in the study expressed beliefs that suggest that practitioners and policy makers do not share the same priorities. The disagreement between the principals and agents regarding what is most important in schools ultimately results in conflicts of interests when they are translated into school reform efforts. If political accountability efforts solely attempt to spur educational change through the use of high-stakes assessments and sanctions, then they will not be able to connect with the educators for whom accountability is expected. Based upon the findings of this study school reform efforts can be developed that better respond to what motivates principals to act as well as encourage reflective school leadership practices.

Connect Principal Motivation to Reform

Principals are driven by altruistic beliefs that center on the academic and social well-being of the students in their school. At times, however, their ability to act on those beliefs conflict with other forces that attempt to exert pressure on the principal. School leaders consider each source of accountability in light of their own priorities, contexts, standards, beliefs and capacity to respond (Leithwood, Steinbach, and Jantzi, 2002;

Kelley et al., 2001; Brown and Clift, 2010) leading to the majority of the participants in the study still opting to attend to an internally defined source of accountability. Why? To answer this question, political and bureaucratic sources of accountability must consider goal alignment and relevance when trying to use accountability as a means of enacting change in schools.

First, how do accountability systems align to the values, beliefs, and priorities of the educators expected to implement them? New or revised accountability measures must make these connections in order to make the reforms an intrinsic motivator to act. Those who do not perceive alignment do not invest in the reform and act according to their own standards. Those who do attend to external sources of accountability are driven by the punitive measures and corrective actions imposed upon them and comply accordingly. Redefining expected outcomes can be a valuable means of connecting the intentions of the principals to the values of the agents.

How relevant are the desired outcomes to the principals as change agents? Making AYP means something different to principals depending on how close or far they are to meeting the benchmark (Brown and Clift, 2010);therefore, the carrot NCLB uses to spur change only appeals to a select group and is lost on the rest because it lacks any relevant meaning. The outcomes must appeal to meeting the individualized needs and potential of students and be considerate of the focus on preparing students for future success. Therefore, future metrics should explore multiple measures that reflect the espoused values and beliefs of the reform initiative. For instance, a measure of performance that examines individual growth over time maintains a focus on student academic achievement while considering the needs of the individuals at the same time.

Another example includes the use of post graduation data to evaluate the effectiveness of our efforts and ensure a long term approach to learning outcomes associated with accountability.

Lastly, a change to the outcome measures may provide some help while redefining consequences to supports may make the desired changes appear more attainable. If contextual factors make change seem impossible to principals, then the current sanctions associated with NCLB do nothing to help alter their perceptions. Future incarnations of accountability policies should consider increasing the technical assistance provided to schools in order to make change a greater possibility. For instance, partnerships with colleges, universities, or other successful schools can increase access to effective strategies and resources that struggling schools have to address the problems that they face, thus replacing hopelessness with hope.

Reflective leadership

A principals' leadership experience can be insulated from the daily practice of their colleagues. On a regular basis, principals interact more frequently with their staff and school community and often must rely on their constituents for feedback on their performance or even encouragement. In the face of the accountability tug-of-war, this study can provide principals with food for thought as they learn about the experiences of others and reflect upon their own situations.

One major finding of this study suggests that most principals across SES and performance dimensions recognize their internal locus of accountability as more motivating than any political or bureaucratic source they encountered. Therefore, by

comparing contexts, conceptions of accountability, and resultant behaviors, schools leaders can reevaluate their own leadership practices to see how they align, or not, with their priorities or pressures. Although they are pulled in different direction, principals can feel empowered to still allow their own values and beliefs guide their actions and help them navigate through some of the complexities associated with their job. If concerned about outcomes, the findings also show that higher performing principals were almost exclusively oriented in this way.

Contribution to Literature

The major contribution of this study to the scholarly literature on the subjects of educational leadership and accountability is through the personal narratives shared by the principals. The phenomenological approach employed in the study allows for a more in depth understanding of the various forms of accountability by seeing the concept of accountability directly through the eyes and experience of middle school principals across SES and achievement contexts. Their perspective illuminates accountabilities theories and typologies by providing practical examples of how they are operationalized in New Jersey public middle schools. The common patterns and different conceptualizations reinforce the complexity of the phenomenon while also helping to make more sense of it. As a result of the findings, the study also promotes a better understanding of perceptions and practices associated with internal accountability.

Study Limitations

The current study offers a unique insight into understanding the role of accountability in the lives of principals. Although the research design allows for a more intimate understanding of the research questions it also creates some limitations that impact the ability to generalize the findings beyond the sample that was studied.

As a result of the methodology employed, a smaller number of participants were used with the intent to "understand several individuals' common or shared experiences of a phenomenon… in order to develop practices or policies, or develop a deeper understanding of the feature of the phenomemon" (Cresswell, 2007, p. 60). While the size of the sample makes the collection and analysis of the qualitative data manageable; having 25 participants in the study also makes it difficult to identify definitive patterns within smaller subsets of the sample. This is limitations evident when trying to explore sources of accountability other than the principal's conscience. At times, interesting patterns arise; however, there is little that can be concluded or generalized when only a couple of participants exist within a coding category. This impact is exacerbated when trying to analyze the data according to SES and achievement attributes as the number of cases is further reduced.

In addition to the limitations of the sample size, the methodology for data collection relied on extrapolating information from one-time interviews conducted with each participant. This was done consciously in order to increase the likelihood of participation of subjects by not imposing on them beyond the single meeting. Although, the interviews followed a prescribed protocol and yielded rich data, the single interview

did not allow for the opportunity to follow up and probe further as themes and patterns developed during the coding of the data over time.

The findings were further limited by the reliance on single source of data. Although according to Creswell (2007), "the reality of an object is only perceived within the meaning of the experience of the individual" (p. 59), there is no means of corroborating the meaning ascribed by the participants in the study. By only basing the results upon the principals' reports of their responses to accountability there is no way to identify whether their statements are accurate representations or merely their perceptions of their behaviors. The findings will always be qualified as the reported practices of the principals without opportunities to triangulate their statements with witnesses or direct observations.

These limitations do not discount the findings; rather, they define the depth and the boundaries by which the results can be interpreted. The study's design was expressly chosen to better understand the experience of principal leadership and accountability.

Recommendations for Further Research

The public understanding of accountability is often colored by political rhetoric or limited by what the media reports on the topic. The current study, in response, uses the perspective of school leadership to broaden the application of the concept beyond just a single source and type of accountability such as NCLB. Building on the research and typologies offered by other scholars, the findings further substantiate the multiple forms of accountability that exist in the educational arena. Considering the lessons learned by

the outcomes of the study as well as the limitations just described, there are four

recommendations for future research.

The first emphasizes the triangulation of data. To confirm many of the claims

made by the participants, it would be valuable to compare principals reported perceptions

of accountability and accompanying leadership practices to other sources of data.

Specifically, additional research can gather the experiences of the students, staff, parents,

and central office administrators to support or clarify the principals' claims. Since the

leadership responses provided in the study did not always connect as logically to the

accountability source in question as expected, exploring other sources of data could offer

a better understanding of the actual pressures for accountability principals attended to

outside of the primary source they identified. By collecting data from those on the

receiving end of the practices, there would also be an opportunity to discover whether

principals' actions translated in the same way they were intended. Do students and staff

view principals as supportive of student learning and achievement? How do the school

community's conceptions of accountability compare to that of the principals'? If

principals state that they are focused on student safety, security, and learning would their

constituents say that their actions support their priorities? Would the constituents also

agree that the principals' reported priorities are the lived priorities?

The next recommendation focuses on deepening the understanding of principals'

accountability to self through an instrumental case study analysis of a single

representative over time in order to illustrate the issue (Creswell, 2007). The current

examination merely scratched the surface of how principals interacted with accountability

in their everyday work. If given the opportunity to spend more time with a principal,

observe actions and interactions, and speak with constituents, the richness of the

phenomenon can increase tremendously. Furthermore, when adding the dimension of

time, the study can examine the enduring beliefs held by the principals' as new

challenges, pressures, or situations are presented. This would be of particular interest as

AYP benchmark targets continue to increase and more schools find their way onto the

school improvement status continuum as suggested by the oral testimony of the U.S.

Secretary of Education Arne Duncan (2011).

In contrast to the deeper case study analysis, the third recommendation would

attempt to broaden the scope of the study through a quantitative inquiry. Using surveys to

collect greater amounts of data from a larger sample may provide an understanding of the

causal relationships between components in the conceptual framework that the current

methodology could not offer. In addition, the larger sample could yield more data for

analysis of the smaller categories that were revealed in the current findings.

The final suggestion for future research examines the perceptions of

accountability more closely according to the SES dimension. Follow up research may

compare the experiences in higher SES versus lower SES contexts to see if principals in

different school settings think accountability actually works to spur school improvement?

When probed further, additional inquiry may better understand how school leaders view

the fairness of various forms of accountability.

Accountability in education may be as popular as it is misunderstood as a means

of reforming schools. This study underscores the variety of ways that principals conceive

of accountability in their lives and how it influences their practices as school leaders.

Once again, the frequency with which higher achieving principals report accountability to self over other sources suggests something for the future of school improvement initiatives. The evolution of formal accountability systems may be more effective if they encourage an intrinsic motivation for improvement among school leaders and provide meaningful opportunities to build the capacity of schools to make school improvement an attainable reality and not an elusive dream.

Appendix A
Regression Model Data Organization and Output

Using data obtained for the prescreening process for identifying schools to be invited for

participation in a larger evaluation project, this project used Grade Eight Proficiency Assessment (GEPA)

results for 2004, 2005 and 2006. Schools were classified by grade level according to assessments

administered. Schools were included in the statistical modeling if all data elements necessary were

available for all 3 years. Three matched panels of school data were constructed using data elements from a

variety of sources.

School demographic data, including rates of children qualifying for subsidized (free or reduced)

price lunch, children with limited English language proficiency, and children by race/ethnicity were drawn

from NJDOE sources and were averaged for each school over the 3 year period, to account for unexplained

fluctuations and missing data in limited cases. The Locale code from the National Center for Education

Statistics Common Core of Data was merged with the NJDOE school files, such that we could include an

interaction measure to account for the difference between urban poverty (large or midsized central city

schools) and non-urban poverty. Finally, district level data on the percent of adult females with education

level of graduate degree or higher, from the U.S. Census and NCES School District Demographic System

(SDDS) were merged with the NJDOE school demographic and assessment data.

Combined Total Math/Language Arts (ln)	Coef.	Std. Err.	t	P>t
Relative Teacher Salary[1]	0.087	0.018	4.900	*
Class Size	0.000	0.000	-1.330	
% New Teachers with BA only	-0.019	0.016	-1.200	
% Free or Reduced Lunch	-0.125	0.008	-15.070	*
% Special Education	-0.173	0.025	-6.970	*
% LEP/ELL	-0.017	0.022	-0.790	
% Asian/Pacific Islander	0.025	0.012	2.080	**
% Black	-0.095	0.006	-15.930	*
Urban Poverty Interaction[2]	-0.052	0.007	-7.180	*
% Adult Females in District with BA or Higher	0.203	0.022	9.280	*
Elementary School	0.006	0.004	1.530	
DFG	0.007	0.003	2.130	**
ln of Enrollme	-0.005	0.002	-2.510	**
Year=2005	0.001	0.002	0.310	
Year=2006	0.007	0.002	3.030	*
Intercept	6.073	0.023	265.920	*

*p<.01, **p<.05
[1] Relative to same degree & experience level teachers in other schools in same labor market
[2] Interaction of urban district indicator with % free lunch measure

Appendix B
Superintendent Consent Form

Raymond A. González
Rutgers University, Graduate School of Education
10 Seminary Place
New Brunswick, NJ 08901-1183

Greetings!

My name is Raymond González and I am a doctoral student at Rutgers University as well as a principal in Westwood Regional School District. The reason for this communication is to formally request permission to interview a middle school principal in your district as part of research for a doctoral dissertation focused on how school leaders approach the problems created by different forms of accountability. The data collected from the study is completely anonymous where there will be no connection to the school leader or to your district in the study.

If you agree to allow a principal in your district to participate in the study, please provide written consent using the form below or on your district's letterhead to me using the enclosed self-addressed envelope.

Thank you in advance for your help with this important project.

Sincerely,

Raymond A. González

- -

Superintendent Consent for Dissertation Study:

I, _____, Superintendent of _____ give permission for Raymond A. González, doctoral student at Rutgers University, to interview a principal in my school district. I understand that the data collected is part of research for a dissertation in the area of leadership, accountability, and problem solving. Furthermore, I understand that the data collected for the study will be completely anonymous and no information will be available which identifies participating individuals or districts.

Research Title: **A Qualitative Exploration of Leadership Accountability, and Problem Solving (Protocol #E08-483)**

Superintendent Name: _____.

Superintendent Signature of Approval: _____.

Date: _____.

Appendix C
Principal Informed Consent Form

Pre-Interview Survey for Principals

Rutgers University

1   We are Raymond A. Gonzalez and Steven J. Mayer, graduate students at Rutgers University. This survey is part of a research study to determine how school leaders interact with accountability and the problems it can create. Thanks you for your willingness to participate.

This research is anonymous. Anonymous means that we will record no information about you that could identify you. This means that we will not record your name, address, phone number, date of birth, etc. If you agree to take part in the study, you will be assigned a random code number that will be used on this questionnaire and for your interview. Your name will appear <u>only</u> on a list of subjects, and will <u>not</u> be linked to the code number that is assigned to you. There will be no way to link your responses back to you. Therefore, data collection is anonymous.

Our research team and the Institutional Review Board at Rutgers University are the only parties that will be allowed to see the data, except as may be required by law. A published report of this study will not contain identifiable information. All study data will be kept in complete confidence for three years from the time of the study.

There are no foreseeable risks to participation in this study and its benefits are to the field of educational leadership. You may receive no direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to participate, and you may withdraw at any time during the study procedures without penalty to you. In addition, you may choose not to answer any questions with which you are not comfortable.

If you have any questions about the study or study procedures you may contact Raymond A. Gonzalez at (201) 281-0312 or Steven J. Mayer at (609) 203-0924 or you can contact our professor and adviser, Dr. William A. Firestone at (732) 932-7496.

If you have any questions about the study or study procedures, you may contact the IRB Administrator at Rutgers University at:

Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects Office of Research and Sponsored Programs
3 Rutgers Plaza
New Brunswick, NJ 08901-8559
Tel. (732) 932-0150
email: humansubjects@orsp.rutgers.edu

Please check below that you have read and understand this consent form.

○   I have read the above consent form and am willing to continue with this research project.
○   I am not willing to continue as a participant in this research project.

2   Choose the option that best describes your school type (grade configuration):

[▼]

3   How many years have you been the principal at this school?

4   How many years have you been a school principal?

5   How many years have you been in the field of education?

6   Please indicate if you are male or female.
   ○ Male
   ○ Female

SUBMIT

Appendix D
Pre-interview Survey

Pre-Interview Survey for Principals

Rutgers University

This questionnaire is designed to help us gain a better understanding of the kinds of things that create challenges for principals in their school activities.

Directions: Please indicate your opinion about each of the questions below by marking one of the nine responses in the columns on the right side. The scale of responses ranges from "None at all" (1) to "A Great Deal" (9), with "Some Degree" (5) representing the mid-point between these low and high extremes. You may choose any of the nine possible responses, since each represents a degree on the continuum. Your answers are confidential.

"In your current role as principal, to what extent can you..."

7   facilitate student learning in your school?

None at all		Very little		Some degree		Quite a bit		A great deal
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

8   generate enthusiasm for a shared vision for the school?

None at all		Very little		Some degree		Quite a bit		A great deal
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

9   handle the time demands of the job?

None at all		Very little		Some degree		Quite a bit		A great deal
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

10   manage change in your school?

None at all		Very little		Some degree		Quite a bit		A great deal
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

11 promote school spirit among a large majority of the student population?

None at all		Very little		Some degree		Quite a bit		A great deal
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

12 create a positive learning environment in your school?

None at all		Very little		Some degree		Quite a bit		A great deal
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

13 raise student achievement on standardized tests?

None at all		Very little		Some degree		Quite a bit		A great deal
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

14 promote a positive image of your school with the media?

None at all		Very little		Some degree		Quite a bit		A great deal
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

15 motivate teachers?

None at all		Very little		Some degree		Quite a bit		A great deal
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

16 promote the prevailing values of the community in your school?

None at all		Very little		Some degree		Quite a bit		A great deal
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

17 maintain control of your own daily schedule?

None at all		Very little		Some degree		Quite a bit		A great deal
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

18   shape the operational policies and procedures that are necessary to manage your school?

None at all		Very little		Some degree		Quite a bit		A great deal
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

19   handle effectively the discipline of students in your school?

None at all		Very little		Some degree		Quite a bit		A great deal
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

20   promote acceptable behavior among students?

None at all		Very little		Some degree		Quite a bit		A great deal
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

21   handle the paperwork required of the job?

None at all		Very little		Some degree		Quite a bit		A great deal
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

22   promote ethical behavior among school personnel?

None at all		Very little		Some degree		Quite a bit		A great deal
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

23   cope with the stress of the job?

None at all		Very little		Some degree		Quite a bit		A great deal
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

24   prioritize among competing demands of the job?

None at all		Very little		Some degree		Quite a bit		A great deal
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

25 Following are problems that school principals face.
Please **rank** them from **Hardest** to solve **(1)** to **Easiest** to solve **(6)**.

1	2	3	4	5	6

You have just received notification that your school's general education population did not make Adequate Yearly Progress in Language Arts Literacy the previous year.

You have just received notification that your school's African American population did not make Adequate Yearly Progress in Language Arts Literacy for the third year in a row.

Members of your Parent Teacher Association (PTA) notify you that they are unhappy with writing instruction in your school.

In the most recent report compiled by your district's department of human resources, you received notification that 20% of your faculty is not considered highly qualified.

Your superintendent informs you that he/she is unhappy with your school's performance in reading and writing.

Your faculty is angry that NCLB places such a strong emphasis on test scores, yet you have just been directed by your superintendent to compose a corrective action plan to address your school's consistent underperformance.

26 Below is a list that represents things to which other principals have said they are held accountable. Please take a moment to review the list and rank the items in order of those things to which you feel Most Accountable (1) and Least Accountable (7).

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

District/Central Office

Parents

State Testing/Adequate Yearly Progress

Your Own Conscience

This portion of the survey will be used to support the research aims of this study by providing insight to how principals prioritize multiple accountabilities.

Board of Education

Teachers

Other Principals

SUBMIT

Appendix E
Interview Guide

Subject number: N/A
School number: N/A
Number of years as principal of this school: XX
Total years experience as principal: XX
Total years of experience as a teacher: XX

I. Values & Beliefs:

1. What is your highest priority as a school leader?
2. Who determines that priority? In other words, in what ways do others or other's expectations contribute to the priorities you hold as a school leader?
3. In your opinion, what matters most in schools?
4. Do you think politicians would agree with you? Parents? School board? Teachers?

II. Conceptions of Accountability:

5. The following set of questions is focused on exploring the different ways you feel held accountable as a school principal and what you do in response. (Select the highest rated items (1-2) indicated in the Multiple Accountability Ranking completed by the participant (refer to pre-interview survey)). Probe as needed to make sure that the following question are answered with specific descriptions.

    a. What does it mean to be held accountable (whatever the answer was)?
        *PROBE for "What you feel accountable for?"

    b. Why does this source of accountability rank higher than others in your list?
        *PROBE for descriptions/examples

    c. As a result, how do you respond to this form of accountability?
        *PROBE for specific descriptions of behaviors, actions, responses <u>with examples.</u>

    d. What happens if you are successful?
        *PROBE for descriptions/examples

    e. What happens if you are not?
        *PROBE for descriptions/examples

    > **Questions 5a-f** will examine the external accountability forces that exist and how principals conceptualize and respond to them.

    f. In what ways does this source of accountability enable you to do things to support student achievement?
        *PROBE for descriptions/examples

    g. How does this source of accountability prevent you from supporting student achievement?
       *PROBE for descriptions/examples

6. Of the possible sources of accountability discussed today or described in the pre-interview survey, are there any sources that conflict in your work as a principal. If so, describe how you interpret the multiple sources of accountability.
   *Probe further for explanation / description of source.

> **Question 6** will examine the interaction of multiple accountabilities and how principals conceptualize and respond to them.

III. Leader's conception of and response to problems

In your pre-interview survey, you were asked to rank order six problems in terms of how difficult they are to solve. You identified the following problem as the most difficult: (Cite problem). I would like to ask a series of questions related to how you might choose to solve this problem given the opportunity.

7. How will you try to make sense of this problem?

8. Sometimes problems can create opportunities, if this problem actually arose, in what terms would you view it?

9. Who will you involve in solving this problem?
   - Community?
   - Central Office?
   - Teachers?
   - Students?

10. What role does each (named group) play in solving this problem?

11. What information will you use in solving the problem?

12. How will each (named source of information) be used?

13. What would you like to see change as a result of solving this problem?

14. What would you hope your school learns as a result of solving a problem like this?

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