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# THE EFFECTS OF NCLB AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CHANGE: A MODIFIED DELPHI STUDY OF PRINCIPALS' PERCEPTIONS

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I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Melissa Henry Blalock entitled "THE EFFECTS OF NCLB AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CHANGE: A MODIFIED DELPHI STUDY OF PRINCIPALS' PERCEPTIONS." I have examined the final electronic copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in Educational Administration.

Ernest W. Brewer, Major Professor

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THE EFFECTS OF NCLB AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CHANGE:  
A MODIFIED DELPHI STUDY OF PRINCIPALS' PERCEPTIONS

A Dissertation Presented for the  
Doctor of Philosophy  
Degree  
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Melissa Henry Blalock

May 2014

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## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to...

...Dr. Ernest W. Brewer, my compassionate committee chair.

Thank you for being an advocate for the hopes and dreams of your students.

I will be forever grateful to you.

...my husband, Mike.

Thank you for making life fun and for making me take breaks from working to enjoy all the blessings we have together. I thank you for the promises you have made, the promises you have kept, and the promise of what is yet to come.

...my parents, Jim and Donna.

Thank you for your unconditional love, your guidance and willingness to live by example. Thank you for loving me when I have struggled to learn life's lessons for myself. Thank you for instilling in me the belief that working hard matters and anything is possible.

...to our son, Stephen.

Your birth during this journey has brought joy into my life like nothing else I have ever known—a bliss that can only be experienced through the love of a child. I hope my endeavors will inspire you to believe in yourself, the benefits of education, and the determination to seek out change and make a difference in the lives of others.

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## ABSTRACT

This modified Delphi study explored the effects of No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 (Public Law 10-110) on the nation's education system and the challenges it has presented to public school principals nationwide regarding their ability to be agents of change at a local level while maintaining effective leadership. National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) and National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) 2009-2011 national and state awards yielded a purposive, homogeneous sample of 448 principals honored as experts in the field of educational leadership and qualified to make recommendations for future reauthorization of NCLB. Through use of PsychData online survey service, Phase 1 involved two rounds of open-ended questions iteratively to a discrete panel of experts drawn from sample; Phase 2, administering the NCLB Perceptions Questionnaire (75 five-point Likert-scale items generated from respondents' Phase 1 input) to a second distinct panel. Qualitative data analysis was accomplished with QDA Miner 4; quantitative data, SPSS 20 (descriptive statistics, factor analysis, MANOVA testing). Descriptively, rank ordering of means indicated that participants selected *strongly agree* or *agree* on 59 (78.7%) of the 75 items (e.g., recommendation to policymakers to confer with principals on proposed changes). Although the selective nature of the sampling puts generalizability somewhat in question, findings interpreted from analysis of a wealth of participant perceptions increase our understanding of principals' perceptions of myriad educational issues (e.g., accountability, individual student growth, problems with achievement, loss of local control, and ways to make a difference in national policies through organizations). Despite their inability to reach consensus regarding NCLB's societal impact on the plight



of public education, principals expressed opinions on both sides of this debate that can be traced back to NCLB's inception. This study is distinctive in implementation of this modified Delphi technique design to obtain input regarding NCLB from principals nationwide representing both elementary and secondary levels of our public education system. The study helps bring to light the need to provide a voice to those in the field who know first-hand the many daily challenges of educating our students in America's 21st century public schools.

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

Educational leadership is a vast field that has become increasingly complex throughout the history of public education. Programs seeking to prepare educational leaders are changing the focus of theory and practice from what leaders do and how they do it to looking at the purpose of leadership (Lyman, Ashby, & Tripses, 2005). An educational leader must be a strong, visionary, relationship-building, power-distributing individual who is capable of bringing about change at a local level. However, that is just the beginning of the prerequisites that make for a successful educational leader in the 21st century. One must also have a firm grasp on the challenges created in the field by the different forces at play in the world of educational reform. Educational leaders must understand this storm and be able to stand with the stakeholders around them, to weather the reforms, and to do what is best for the students they serve. Tooms (2005) makes this analogy about understanding the effects of reform,

...the principal's struggle to balance change with leadership as a knight on a white horse galloping through a battlefield to rescue the village that is his school. Everyday problems along with edicts for action come in the form of flaming arrows or cannonballs that are shot at him. Sometimes he sees the arrows zooming in head-on, and sometimes they are coming from directions he cannot pinpoint. Through on-the-job training, our noble principal learns to sense when the arrows are coming and how to steer the horse out of their path. However, experience does not guarantee complete protection and sometimes the knight gets injured. (p. 134)

The effects of reform on the nation's education system have never been more prevalent than in the aftermath of No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 (Public Law 10-110), especially in terms of the challenges it has presented for principals in the field to maintain the balance between change and effective leadership within their buildings. Today's educational leaders must stand united in the belief that, "...the creation of an equal and liberating school system requires a revolutionary transition of economic life" (Bowles & Gintis, 1976, p. 265).

### **Rationale for the Study**

Creating a truly equal public education system in the United States will not be brought to fruition by only implementing educational policies demanding accountability for gains by all students; these policies cannot work without corresponding societal changes reforming the economic conditions of our most underprivileged children. President Lyndon Johnson understood and worked to address this disparity through implementing the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), the first educational policy to provide federal funds to support underprivileged students. The accountability of educators to produce gains through student achievement, despite a student's socio-economic background, was not originally part of the law. The ESEA was the beginning of Title I funding to help give all students a more equitable chance for education prior to attending college. However, through a number of reauthorizations, NCLB has greatly changed in scope and sequence from its original design in an attempt to make education in America equal for all students through increased accountability of educators. No Child Left Behind calls for increased accountability for students'

achievement, quality educators in every classroom, and the expectation that all students will read on grade level by 2014. The guidelines may sound like a recipe for an educational utopia; however, as school principals have led the implementation of the law in the field, the ramifications have resulted in anything but a utopia.

According to the U.S. Department of Education “First Look” report for 2009-2010, there were 169,171 school administrators nationwide serving 49,373,307 students from pre-kindergarten through grade 12 (Chen, 2011, p. 6). Regardless of the region of the United States an administrator serves, whether at an elementary or secondary level, despite the geographic classification (i.e., rural, urban, or suburban), and in spite of the socio-economic levels of the students, all principals are expected to serve as agents of change producing quantitative gains for all students. For the first time in our nation’s history, the administrator’s and the school’s success is directly tied to students’ (as individuals and in subgroups) making Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). Although accountability is not new, how leaders are held accountable has changed (Elmore, 2005). The possibility of an administrator’s losing his or her job based on lack of student achievement represents another first for our education system. This challenge is exacerbated by the fact that there is no guide or rubric to provide a roadmap for leading a school successfully.

Added to the public’s awareness of a school’s failure in attaining AYP goals, an administrator faces possible punitive action by the state. As an example, the state may choose to implement a systematic process within the given school which can lead to the state’s taking over the school and the administrator’s losing his or her position if

appreciable improvements are not realized within an allotted amount of time. Fink (2005) characterized this shift in leadership accountability saying, “We are making the business of leadership so complicated that we seem to need ‘super heroes’ to run a school” and yet “...most of us involved in educational leadership are just ordinary people who are just trying to do the best we can with the tools that we were born with” (p. xiv). Seashore (2009) described the plight of educators stating:

The dichotomy between a desire for all students to be competent by 2010, and the relatively weak knowledge base that we have about how to do that represents a split between America’s historically millennial thinking, applied to education, and the realities of making ideas work in a world that is increasingly identified as postmodern (Hargreaves, 1994), chaotic (Wheatley, 1992), multicultural (Deplit, 1995), and inhabited by ‘wicked’ problems (Mason & Mitroff, 1981). Caught in the middle are educational professionals, who find themselves alternately energized and exhausted by trying to make the world a better place. (p. 129)

The increasing demands on administrators to do more with less, to navigate mandates set forth by federal policies, and to bring about school improvement is the focus of this study. Leadership is highly promoted as necessary for improving schools in order to advance students (Bailey, Cameron, & Cortez-Ford, 2004; Cotton, 2003; Donaldson, 2001; Elmore, 2000; Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003; Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2003). More than ever, the need for administrators to rise to the challenge of being agents of change is imperative. Fullan (1993) summarized the challenge as follows:

To become experts in the dynamics of change—administrators and teachers alike—must become skilled change agents. If they do become skilled change agents with moral purpose, educators will make a difference in the lives of students from all backgrounds, and by so doing help produce great capacity in society to cope with change. (p. 4)

### **Statement of the Problem**

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) has forced schools in need to change. The administrators of these schools are expected to be the leaders of this change; at the same time, there has been no guide for how to accomplish this when faced with a surreal federal mandate. Further complicating this charge is the fact that, even though a limited number of educators were involved in the creation of the policy, educational policies are created and passed by non-educators. Frequently, as has been the case with NCLB, the fundamental direction of the policy and the ability to see it through to fruition has not been fully realized; this shortfall has contributed to many challenges experienced since its inception. Students in the public schools across our nation already face many challenges in learning skills needed to be successful, contributing, well-rounded adults without also having to deal with the shift in focus to test scores. Given this expectation of administrators to be the agents of change, even in the face of unrealistic federal policies, an important question arises. How do we give a voice to those in the field who know the daily trials and tribulations of educating students in the 21st century in America's public schools, especially given the fact that they are spread out across the nation and have

much of their time consumed with implementing unrealistic and perhaps unattainable reform policies at a local level?

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this modified Delphi study was to explore the effects of NCLB on principals in the field and to identify the positive and negative effects it has had on their ability to be agents of change at a local level. The researcher sought to provide a forum for the discussion of this phenomenon that might not otherwise be possible due to logistics, cost, and time. In addition, this discussion was expanded to include perceptions from experts in the field on recommendations for the reauthorization of this law in the near future. This study was not intended to criticize politicians or the political process currently in place; however, the study was intended to build a bridge of communication between policymakers and school administrators in the field—a bridge provided as a result of higher education research.

### **Significance of the Study**

The significance of the study was threefold, informing (1) policymakers, (2) educational leadership, and (3) organizational reform. The study conducted informed policymakers of the impact educational policies have had on educational leaders and the need to continue to create policies that provide the means for leaders to foster educational excellence within schools. The study informed current educational leaders (i.e., school superintendents and administrators) on ways to use introspection while navigating federal mandates and acting as agents of change in the field. At the same time, the study served as a guide for leadership preparation programs by providing insight into the dilemma

principals face as agents of change in the wake of federal policies. Finally, the study expanded upon the need for organizational reform providing those principals, the current experts in the field, a voice through a shared forum to express thoughts about creating educational policies.

### **Research Questions**

Generally speaking, policy changes often set a ripple effect in motion in almost any arena. When these changes occur at the federal level, as in the case of NCLB, the effect can be highly significant and far-reaching, often bringing about unintended consequences. Policy changes warrant scrutiny. In the educational world, it seems wise to probe principals' perceptions of NCLB's effects on their own levels of stress and job satisfaction as well as on those of other affected demographic and socio-economic subgroups. This will be seen more clearly in the Chapter 2 review of literature and the justification for a nationwide study of principals' perceptions at both elementary and secondary levels, ensuring that the broad spectrum of socio-economic and demographic groups in our country are appropriately represented.

On this note, the researcher sought to offer a forum for the discussion of the ramifications of NCLB and recommendations for future changes to the law. This modified Delphi study was designed to elicit the opinions of principals across the nation and to give them a voice as experts in the field regarding current educational legislation. To this end, the following research questions were addressed:

1. What effects has the current NCLB legislation had on you and your ability to be an agent of change in your school?



2. What recommendations for change to the law would you suggest in the next iteration of the legislation?

### **Assumptions of the Study**

Conducting a nationwide, modified Delphi study called for a number of assumptions and conditions considered acceptable to supporting the spirit of the study. In designing this study and conducting the data collection and analysis needed, the researcher assumed the following to be true:

1. School administrators honored as National Distinguished Principals and State Principals of the Year would serve well as representatives of the leadership in the field of education. They would be considered experts among their peers and would be potentially able to lend valuable insight into the complex dilemma experienced by principals striving to make positive change, even when faced with challenging federal mandates.
2. Principals would interpret the open-ended and multiple choice questions correctly and self-report their responses honestly.
3. Participants would be motivated to participate in the study because they were passionate in their feelings about policies they had had no part in creating, but for which they were responsible to implement.

### **Delimitations of the Study**

Delimitations are boundaries set by the researcher. The following delimitations of the research study were imposed:

1. The data collected focused solely on the self-reported opinions of principals engaged in implementing daily practices within their respective schools. The process excluded other personnel and stakeholders involved in the implementation of reform such as students, assistants, specialists, and district-level personnel. While concerns of all stakeholders were deemed worthwhile, inclusion of stakeholders other than principals went beyond the stated purpose and scope of this research study.
2. The sample for the modified Delphi study was limited to the respondents to the emails sent out to the 448 principals honored as 2009-2011 National Distinguished Principals and State Principals of the Year.
3. Only elementary, middle, and high school principals honored in 2011 were emailed in Phase 1 in an attempt to secure the greatest number of responses from the first 60 participants.

### **Limitations of the Study**

Some conditions were beyond the control of the researcher and might have affected the study in some way. These limitations were perceived as follows:

1. Based on self-reported data, the study was limited by participant understanding of the questions and the honesty of their responses.
2. Participant input was limited to their responses to the survey questions presented and not open to a truly free-response format.
3. The study was limited to the opinions of selected academic experts recognized by education associations to which they themselves belonged.

4. The researcher collected data solely from electronic interactions; therefore, the study was limited to data entered and processed electronically.
5. Due to the sensitive nature of a study topic that significantly overlapped with the researcher's educational career and passion for quality education, the possibility existed that researcher bias may have influenced this study's data analysis and findings in some way.

### **Operational Definitions**

The researcher presented operational definitions of the terms listed below in order to provide clarity throughout the study. This was especially important for terms with more than one meaning or that were vague in their application to the content.

1. *Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)* –The current measure used to gauge the accountability of schools and school districts based on the academic gains of students on standardized tests. Specific gains must be made by all subgroups of students in reading, math, and attendance.
2. *Change Agent* – The ability of the leader (the principal of a school) “to challenge the status quo” (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005, p. 44) in order to bring about change. This also includes the ability of a leader to understand current legislation reform and to work to implement the reform in an academically supportive way for the students served in the respective school.
3. *Local Education Agency (LEA)* – Refers to the person or persons accountable for public authority of operating public schools or any portion of the

responsibility in question. At a site level, this authority is typically recognized and owned by the principal and or his or her administrative team.

4. *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) – The current iteration of the law guiding educational reform in the United States. The law initially enacted by President Lyndon Johnson in the 1960s was created to provide extra financial support to schools serving students of poverty. However, the law has been reauthorized many times; it was reauthorized in 2001 and signed into law by President George W. Bush in 2002. For applicant schools, districts, and states, the stipulations attached to obtaining funds to assist students in need surpass any that our nation’s educators have seen in the history of education. The law specifically links the accountability of the learning of all subgroups within a school to the administrators and teachers at those schools. School achievement is published publicly, and a grade of *failing* is issued to any school not making Adequate Yearly Progress.
5. *Professional Learning Community* (PLC) – A professional group of educators brought together with a common purpose focused on three essential goals: (1) ensuring that students learn, (2) fostering a culture of collaboration, and (3) placing a focus on results. A PLC is dedicated to the hard work and commitment it takes to achieve success in its school. It can comprise one of myriad groups of stakeholders: grade level groups, vertical teams, administrative teams, care teams, committees, departments, district-wide committees, and nationwide organizations (DuFour, 2004).

## **Summary of Chapter 1**

Principals are the leaders in the field whose jobs involve being agents of change while being faced with a variety of challenges on a daily basis. The demands are compounded by the federal mandates that principals are required to adhere to regardless of the feasibility of executing those measures. It is also problematic that they were not directly involved in the creation of the policy. The purpose of this research study was to explore the effects of NCLB on experts in the field, their ability to be agents of change, and their recommendations for future changes to the law. The study focused on whether there was consensus among experts regarding this NCLB phenomenon. The significance of the study lay in the opportunities it provided: a forum for this discussion, a chance to share insights with other principals, greater awareness of policymakers of the perceived effect of policy on principals' ability to bring about organizational change, and information on the effects of policy that may prove helpful to programs preparing future leaders in the school setting.

## **Organization of the Dissertation**

Chapter 1 has introduced the study with an overview of the issue investigated (i.e., the rationale for the choice of topic, the purpose and significance of the study), the research questions addressed, and the parameters applied (i.e., assumptions, delimitations, limitations, and operational definitions). The remaining four chapters describe the study in greater detail and demonstrate how the study was conducted to answer the research questions. In Chapter 2, the literature review examines what has been published and collected regarding the topic researched, identifies any gaps yet to be

filled, and substantiates the theoretical framework that guided this research study. Topics include, but are not limited to, principals and policy, the theoretical framework, history of the Delphi technique, NCLB, and a summary of relevant studies. Chapter 3 explains the modified Delphi study design selected for this study and describes the methodology employed. Chapter 4 summarizes the results of the data collection and analysis. The main body of the dissertation culminates in Chapter 5's discussion of the analysis of the compiled data and suggested recommendations for future research, followed by a list of references and addendices displaying letters, instructions, and instruments used.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Review of Literature**

Chapter 2's review of the literature represents a synthesis of findings derived from a comprehensive, though not necessarily exhaustive, search of books, scholarly and professional journals, reports, dissertations, and legislative acts. Sources located were assessed and screened in terms of their relevance to the importance of policy in the daily role of a principal charged with making a difference at a local/building level and to the history and effects of NCLB in particular. Results of this intensive review served as the foundation for the theoretical framework that guided and supported this study as described in this chapter. Following the description of the theoretical framework, the cumulative results of the review are summarized into related topics of interest such as the background, history, effects, and perceptions of NCLB; aspects of principal leadership, stress, and job satisfaction; background and methodological overview of the modified Delphi technique; and key points brought out in other related studies.

### **Principals and Policy**

As agents of change, principals must be able to balance the need to lead change while gauging where their staff is in implementing a new practice and allowing students' individual learning process to unfold. In order to facilitate productive educational change, the need for balance between state accountability and local autonomy must also be embraced (Fullan, 1993). Principals must face the dilemma of implementing educational policies that are often created by politicians and corporate leaders and showcased to solve the nation's social and educational shortfalls, regardless of whether they actually advance

the education and skills of our nation's young people. Political hurdles can be an obstacle for principals forging the change needed in our nation's schools.

Cuban (2011) reflects upon the inequalities and the dichotomy of public school settings, explaining that schools are three-tiered systems which parallel the inequalities in society, disparities that schools may not be able to dissolve. This situation is only compounded by general national sentiment that disregards the importance of teacher unions and lays claim to any sense of respect current educators have been able to maintain. Cuban proposes that part of the lack of confidence may be attributed to the educators themselves not being strong enough to stand together and speak out against the distrust and disenfranchised way schools are frequently portrayed in the media. Such portrayals often detract from the true purpose of educators and their students—teaching and learning. Instead of focusing on that purpose, principals often spend countless hours adhering to educational policy that has not been created to serve our nation's youth more effectively; it has been created because it sounds good and takes the spotlight off of other societal ills that politicians avoided talking about.

Policy implementation at a local level is just one of the many roles that principals are expected to influence at a local level. There are two noteworthy studies regarding principals' impact at the building level that merit further discussion: "The Ripple Effect" (Clifford, Behrstock-Sherratt, & Fetters, 2012) and *School Leadership That Works* (Marzano, McNulty, & Waters, 2005).

In "The Ripple Effect," Clifford, Behrstock-Sherratt, and Fetters (2012) look at the principal's impact from a more global perspective. Their article indicates that



programs proven to be successful in given buildings can be implemented in other buildings with strong principal influence. It suggests that the principal's influence on successful implementation "...includes [the] principal['s] knowledge, dispositions, and actions" (p. 7). The framework described in this study involves an interconnecting influence based on the quality of the principal's professional practices.

*School Leadership That Works* (Marzano, McNulty, and Waters, 2005) explores the principal's impact through specific responsibilities and the impact those responsibilities have on improving student achievement. It directly correlates each of 21 principal responsibilities to student academic achievement. The responsibility with the highest correlation is the principal's situational awareness—the ability to have a finger on the pulse of current issues within the school and to address issues before they become problems. Another responsibility noted to have measurable effects on student achievement is the principal's acting as a change agent to actively challenge the status quo. Last but not least is the principal's ability to build relationships with others and to foster relationships between staff members and students.

Crew (2011), in the chapter titled "Passion Versus Purpose," addresses challenges for educators by taking the discussion back to the need for relationships; building relationships is how we really bring about change (both in our nation and in our schools). Crew describes the need to end the emphasis on test scores that only indicate where students have been (not how far they can go) and to focus more on how well students think, write, and solve problems for themselves. To ameliorate the standardized test-laden, top-down, bureaucracy-led American schools' plight, Cortes (2011) suggests that

educators require *metis* (the Greek word for local knowledge). According to Fowler (2009), to combat the fragmentation in educational governance, educators must network, build coalitions, share experiences, and gather strength from their combined expertise.

This study sought to provide a forum for the shared experiences of principals faced with NCLB mandates and to offer an avenue for suggestions on the best ways to change the policy in the future. On a small scale, the researcher hoped to engage principals in a healthy conversation about their shared experiences in implementing NCLB, both positive and negative. As far as this researcher could determine through a thorough review of published studies, this approach had not been taken previously on such a scale (nationwide) or by these means (modified Delphi study) with this population. The next section explains the theoretical framework that guided this study of principals' perceptions, followed by a more detailed discussion of NCLB and the study design.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The purpose of this study was to provide a forum for expert principals in the field to offer their insights on how they viewed NCLB. In order to capture the phenomenon of the effects of an educational policy on principals in the field, the researcher selected an inductive approach to data collection. Maxwell (2005) describes the difference in quantitative and qualitative traditions stating:

Quantitative researchers tend to be interested in whether and to what extent variance in  $x$  causes variance in  $y$ . Qualitative researchers, on the other hand, tend to ask how  $x$  plays a role in causing  $y$ , what the process is that connects  $x$  and  $y$ . (p.23)

Specifically in this study, the researcher sought to explore the policy of NCLB ( $x$ ) and the effect it had had on principals in the field in their effort to be leaders of change at the building level ( $y$ ). The researcher's personal experience in the field and desire to capture the essence of principals' perceptions across the nation fit a phenomenological approach. Such a qualitative study is typically addressed through a theoretical lens to gain better insight into the topic of interest. Further investigation led to the decision to adopt the modified Delphi technique (discussed later in this chapter) as the study design.

A theory that is useful illuminates the phenomenon the researcher is exploring and sheds new light on the relationships involved (Anfara & Mertz, 2006; Maxwell, 2005). The theoretical framework that contributed to this exploration by laying the philosophical groundwork was Spillane's (2004) *sensemaking theory*. Sensemaking theory entails how policy implementers at the ground level comprehend and put into action an educational policy (Gonzalez, 2008; Spillane, 2004). How policy implementers at a local level understand their respective environment (school and district), complex mental models of leadership, and experiences from the past makes a difference in the policies' outcome (Gonzalez). Humans form their beliefs about their world and the decisions they make in it through reflection and retrospection (Gonzalez). Having principals reflect upon the positive and negative effects of NCLB on their abilities to be agents of change offers key insight into how they make sense of the policy. Extent of success resulting from the educational policy depends largely upon this understanding by building level administrators and how they implement it at a local level.

To expand upon this brief explanation of Spillane's sensemaking theory, the researcher conducted a simple search on sensemaking theory to locate other studies developed using the same theory. The researcher used ProQuest, the database of choice for a study concentrating on public education policy and public schools in the United States. The initial search was performed several times using different advanced search descriptors, yielding over 5,000 dissertations in circulation across multiple disciplines. With the search was restricted to publication dates in the last 10 years (i.e., 2004-2014) and subjects that involved sensemaking and the topic of education (i.e., principals, leadership, and administration), the list was then narrowed down to seven studies of interest (shown in Table 1) that directly or indirectly influenced the researcher's understanding of sensemaking theory and its use in framing the theoretical foundation of other studies.

The seven studies shared many similarities. All of the studies were qualitative in nature and used some form of case study for the design, with the data coming from sources such as interviews, observations, or documents (or some combination of the three). The studies all focused on principals' perceptions of the implementation of a program within their buildings or some aspect of principalship or educational leadership.

Another common thread woven into these studies linked the major contributors in the field to the topic of sensemaking. The researcher previously mentioned Spillane (2004) and Gonzalez (2008) and their work regarding sensemaking. Karl Weick (1995) and his contribution to sensemaking theory were also noted in more than one of the studies reviewed. Weick developed seven characteristics of the sensemaking theory:

Table 1

*Previous Sensemaking Theory Studies*

Title	Author, Institution, Year	Design	Data Collection
The Role of the Principal in the Implementation of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports in Exemplar Elementary Schools in North Carolina	Monica Dolores Headen, North Carolina State University, 2013	Qualitative, multiple case study	Interviews, focus groups, field notes, questionnaires, and physical artifacts
Principal Sensemaking of Inclusion: A Multi-case Study of Five Urban School Principals	David Edward DeMatthews, University of Maryland, 2012	Multiple case study	Interviews and observations
Principals' Sensemaking of the Implementation of Skillful Observation and Coaching Laboratory	Jennifer Carraway, North Carolina State University, 2012	Multiple case study	Interviews, documents, and observations
"A Place of Becoming" Leadership Educators' Experiences Teaching Leadership: A Phenomenological Approach	Heath E. Harding, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, 2011	Case study	Semi-structured interviews
Making Sense of Accountability: A Qualitative Exploration of How Eight New York City High School Principals Negotiate the Complexity of Today's Accountability Landscapes	Susan Saltrick, Columbia University, 2010	Multiple case study	Interviews, observations, policy documents, and cross-comparison
Identifying and Understanding Practices That Help Principals Create Cultures of Student Achievement	Kristyn Marie Klei, University of California, Berkeley, 2008	Case study	Interviews, observations, and documents

(1) grounded in identity construction, (2) retrospective, (3) enhanced by enactment of sensible environments, (4) social, (5) ongoing, (6) focused on and by extracted cues, and (7) driven by plausibility rather than accuracy (DeMatthews, 2012; Headen, 2013; Klei, 2008; Meloche, 2006). DeMatthews (2012) explained that Weick also developed a conceptual model based on sensemaking by integrating the seven characteristics into four emphases: “(1) ecological change (i.e., identifying something as different or new), (2) enactment (i.e., constructing what is sensed), (3) selection (i.e., choosing a plausible explanation), and (4) retention (i.e., holding onto the plausible selection for future reference)” (p. 9). These studies included many similarities (e.g., the type of study, the study design, overlapping data collection techniques) and shared some of the same noted researchers contributing to sensemaking theory. These seven studies are discussed further below, followed by sections on historical highlights of educational reform and NCLB.

**Discussion of the seven sensemaking theory studies.** Regarding the seven sensemaking theory studies selected, the first three studies focused specifically on the principals’ perceptions of programs being implemented in their buildings. Headen (2013) explored the implementation of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) in elementary schools across the state of North Carolina and determined that principals made a difference in the successful implementation of the program. In addition, Headen found the attributes of sensemaking determined to be prominent were social and plausibility rather than accuracy. DeMatthews (2012) investigated five urban school principals’ perceptions of inclusion and established that principals’ ability to make sense of inclusion and to implement it based on their attitudes and beliefs was limited by

financial constraints and students' behaviors. Similarly, Carraway (2012) focused on principals' perceptions of the implementation of Skillful Observation and Coaching Laboratory (SOCL) and suggested that principals' sensemaking of the implementation of SOCL included a list of factors: possession of content knowledge, pre-existing knowledge, structural conditions, social interactions, meaningful policy, identity as an instructional leader, and positive feelings.

The other four studies involved some aspect of educational leadership, but the foci varied with each study. In the fourth study, Harding (2011) examined educators who were teaching leadership skills to educators and discovered four themes that centered around two parallel paths: the students' path to leadership development and the path of self-development of the educators. In the fifth study, Saltrick (2010) studied eight New York high school principals and how they negotiated high-stakes accountability. The finding revealed the principals made sense of accountability through personal, organizational, and external forms (e.g., professional experience and beliefs, internal accountability); in addition, their sensemaking was aided by habits of the mind, professional relationships, and self-renewal strategies.

In the sixth study, Klei (2008) identified practices that principals used to create cultures of student achievement and determined that these factors had an impact on student achievement levels: instructional leadership, leadership styles, communication, collaboration, community, and culture. In the final study, Meloche (2006) inquired into the journey of a classroom teacher to becoming an elementary school principal. The conceptual framework was three-pronged, incorporating theories of transition,

transformation, and sensemaking. The findings noted that the participants were resilient and driven by a vision; they capitalized on prior experience in the classroom and kept children's interests as their priority.

In summary, principals' perceptions of the effects of NCLB on their ability to be agents of change and their suggestions for future changes to the policy were the focal point of this study. Spillane's sensemaking theory was the theoretical lens used to guide this exploration into the sensemaking process. The use of sensemaking theory to guide doctoral dissertation theoretical frameworks has been a common practice across multiple disciplines, and seven studies that either highlight principals' perceptions through sensemaking or some aspect of educational leadership have been summarized here. However, sensemaking theory has not been used to specifically explore the effects of NCLB on principals in the field. Therefore, in order to better understand the policy at the core of this study, a history of school reform and background information about how NCLB came into effect is necessary.

**Brief history of school reform.** It is important to look at reform in our nation's history through a wider lens. According to Simsek (2005),

...educational values have shifted consistent with the larger value shifts in society from perennial/essential pedagogy of Mann and his contemporaries, to progressivism of Dewey, to scientism of the statist era, and finally to constructivism in the neo-liberal market phase. (p. 22)

Prior to the 1950s, public education evolved as populations in towns and cities increased. As the number of students grew, schools moved from a one-room schoolhouse



that served a small number of students in a community into buildings with multiple rooms and with increased numbers of students at different grade levels. Initially, administrators served in both a teaching and an administrative capacity; rarely did those serving in administrative positions hold college degrees. In large part, the responsibility for providing education policy was traditionally left in the hands of state and local governments (Umpstead, 2008).

**Reform history and beginning of No Child Left Behind (NCLB).** The shift of educational responsibility from state and local control to include federal involvement was hallmarked by several events in the 1950s: *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* (1954), the Soviet Union's launch of Sputnik in 1957, and the National Defense Education Act (NDEA) passed by Congress in 1958 (initiating Congress's monetary power to influence public education) (Umpstead, 2008). During the 1960s, Congressional influence then moved to address educational inequalities of poor children and racial differences. Significant changes in the 1960s included the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), and the Bilingual Education Act of 1968 (Umpstead, 2008). ESEA represented an unprecedented effort on behalf of President Lyndon Johnson to create large-scale educational change as part of his war on poverty (Fritzberg, 2004). ESEA was the first intense effort on behalf of the government to bring about equality in education for all students. This act opened the door for alternative education programs that sought to address the needs of students had not shown progress toward succeeding in traditional school settings (Tissington, 2006). Alternative educational programming included, but was not limited to, open schools,

choice options, non-competitive evaluation, child-centered curriculum, schools without walls, schools within schools, multicultural schools, learning centers, and magnet schools (Tissington). ESEA is the predecessor of the current guiding legislation of NCLB to be addressed in detail later.

Congress continued to work on bringing about equality in public education in the 1970s by focusing on students with disabilities. Strategic legislation was enacted to address students who were physically and/or academically challenged; this legislation included the Education Amendments Act of 1972; the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 §504; the Equal Educational Opportunities Act of 1974; and the Education for all Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (Umpstead, 2008). The Education for all Handicapped Children Act was the predecessor of the current legislation guiding students with disabilities, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1990. Congress's initiatives to bring about the equalization of education for all brought about many changes in public education in the United States. At the same time, the government's influence in education came with a price tag. In order to qualify for federal funding, state and local governments had to comply with rules and regulations embedded in the details of these acts. This evolution in the public education system is what brought public schools to the current dilemma that administrators must face. Seashore (2009) described this dilemma stating, "...caught in the middle are educational professionals, who find themselves alternately energized and exhausted by trying to make the world a better place" (p. 136).

Dodd (2009) suggested, “School leadership has always been wrought with high-stakes moral dilemmas” (p. 44). According to Kafka (2009), juggling the different needs of a school is not new to principals:

...being expected to comply with district-level edicts, address personnel issues, order supplies, balance program budgets, keep hallways and playgrounds safe, put out fires that threatened tranquil public relations, and make sure that busing and meal services were operating smoothly. And principals still need to do all those things. But now they must do more. (p. 318)

Added to the increasing challenges and responsibilities of today’s principals, Hodgkinson (1991) stated, “one-third of preschool children are destined for school failure because of poverty, neglect, sickness, handicapping conditions and lack of adult protection and nurturance” (as cited in Fullan, 1993, p. 42). Therefore, schools and the administrators who lead them have a moral purpose, “... to make a difference in the lives of students regardless of their background, and to help produce citizens who can live and work productively in increasingly dynamically complex societies” (Fullan, 1997, p. 4).

As Kafka (2009) aptly stated:

...The call for principals to accomplish great things with little support, and to be all things to all people, is certainly not [new]. What is new is the degree to which schools are expected to resolve society’s social and educational inequities in a market-based environment. (p. 328)

How did these responsibilities come to fall on the shoulders of the principal? In order to answer this question, the topic of focus becomes NCLB and the necessities and legislation that brought it into existence.

**No Child Left Behind (NCLB) background.** The foundation of NCLB rests in ESEA established in 1965, and, along with several other redistributive policies at the time, "...began to shift many educational resources away from the 'regular' classroom and toward poor children, children with handicaps, non-English-speaking children, and others" (Fowler, 2009, p. 348). Jorgensen and Hoffman (2003) described it as a part of President Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty and an effort to aid poor schools with low achieving students. The mid- to late 20th century was a time of political and social unrest for the United States. The feeling of unrest and a continued demand for change in all aspects of America's way of life was a strong presence in the educational arena as well. By the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, America's unhappiness with public schools reached a new climax with the federal commission's report, *A Nation at Risk*. The report was published in 1983 and essentially blamed America's public schools as the underlying problem with much that ailed the country at the time. The report stated that schools were not preparing U.S. graduates to compete in a global economy, among other issues, and therefore pointed to the need for major reform in America's schools (Fowler, 2009).

This spawned a variety of reforms from the late 20th century and into the early 21st century, including the Improving America's Schools Act of 1994 (IASA). The Clinton administration had also tried to reauthorize ESEA with Clinton's Goals 2000, however, the administration was not able to get it passed and had to settle for a

“...watered down [version of] the enforcement components of the original bill” (Fowler, 2009, p. 354). Jorgensen and Hoffman (2003) explained that the ESEA was meant to work in concert with Goals 2000 through multiple guiding themes. The themes included high standards for all children; a focus on teaching and learning; partnerships among communities, families, and schools; flexibility coupled with responsibility for student performance; and resources targeted to areas of greatest need. Fowler (2009) continued with the idea that reforms of this era involved movements to complete, restore, or update the *Common School* (traditional schools up to the early 20th century that focused on the basics: reading, writing, arithmetic, history, geography, and math); to professionalize teaching; and to commercialize education.

However, the Fowler (2009) reports that the biggest reform movement to date in the 21st century has been without a doubt the reauthorization of ESEA entitled “No Child Left Behind” by President George W. Bush in 2002. He observed that the passing of this legislation has created an education paradigm shift, and it has sparked controversy and conflict that are likely to continue for many years. President Bush was successful in getting the reauthorization passed due in large part to the bipartisan efforts in the aftermath of September 11, 2001. Both political parties were willing to support a bill that would bring about widespread change to our education system, again striving to make it *the best*. Ideologically, it seemed to be a *win-win* situation.

**Current No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation.** Officially, President George W. Bush signed the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 on January 8, 2001 (Jorgensen & Hoffman, 2003, p. 6). This act greatly expanded and amended the original

ESEA of 1965 legislation regarding America's public schools. "NCLB brought considerable clarity to the value, use, and importance of achievement testing of students in kindergarten through high school" (Jorgensen & Hoffman, 2003, p. 6). In our nation's push to provide the best education possible, NCLB sought to bring about significant changes in public education in the areas of accountability, local control, parent involvement, and teacher qualifications. Rod Paige, the U.S. Secretary of Education, summed up NCLB saying its goal, "is to see every child in America—regardless of ethnicity, income, or background—achieve high standards" (Jorgensen & Hoffman, 2003, p. 6).

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) takes the previous regulations of ESEA, IASA, and Goals 2000 to new levels by enforcing strict accountability guidelines and teacher qualifications. One of the main differences in the new legislation is that the accountability guidelines are directly correlated to the funding received by school districts. No Child Left Behind (NCLB) has been funded through Title 1 funds since the legislation was originally enacted in 1965. However, when states apply for Title 1 funds under the NCLB policy, they are required to put into place a prescribed method of assessment to track student progress and report that progress (or lack of progress) back to the federal government. The assessment is to be done annually for students in Grades 3 through 8 in both reading and mathematics (Jorgensen & Hoffman, 2003). The results of the assessments are not only reported back to the federal government, they are also made public. Schools are expected to make gains with all students as well as students in the prescribed subgroups. This progress is defined as Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP).

Schools making AYP are considered in good standing; however, schools not making AYP are placed on a strategic track to either make the necessary progress or eventually face restructuring. If schools do not comply with the AYP component, funds can be withdrawn. This portion of the legislation has set a new, unprecedented requirement for accountability of individuals within the education arena.

In addition to the accountability guidelines discussed above, NCLB further expands upon earlier legislation by adding a component that requires all teachers to be *highly qualified*. This highly qualified status dictates that all teachers instructing core subjects are to hold a bachelor's degree, to be licensed by the state, and to be knowledgeable about the subject taught by 2006 (Fowler, 2009). Going even further, NCLB requires schools that are receiving Title 1 funds to confirm that their instructional aides hold specified qualifications. These guidelines are meant to ensure that those responsible for the instruction of students are the best prepared to provide instruction to our nation's young people.

With its emphasis on research-based education, NCLB encourages best practices in the classroom. Another landmark aspect of the policy allows parents a choice as to where their child is educated. Typically, parents send their child to the school within their school zone; in other words, students usually attend schools based on the geographical location of their house in relation to the school. However, for parents with children in schools that are failing to reach AYP goals, NCLB provides the option to change to another school of their choice within their zoned school district. This option of choice,

coupled with the public knowledge of inadequacy, is a major source of concern for school systems with struggling schools.

**Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP).** The overarching goal of NCLB “is for 100% of American students to be proficient in reading and mathematics by 2014)” (Fowler, 2009, p. 355). Not only are schools expected to attain AYP as a whole; each subgroup of students must also make AYP (Fowler, 2009). Such high expectations make it imperative for all involved in the education arena to be well versed in the AYP requirements. First, educators must understand the different subgroups being addressed by the AYP guidelines: Native American/Alaskan Native, Asian/Pacific Islander, Black, Hispanic, White, Limited English Proficiency, Economically Disadvantaged, and Students with Disabilities. The AYP guidelines can be located on the U. S. Department of Education’s website (<http://www.ed.gov>). The following summary is taken from the information posted on that website. AYP must be met with the eight subgroups mentioned with no less than 95% of the students in a school being assessed. Schools or districts can reach AYP if 95% of the students participate in the assessment and if each subgroup meets or exceeds the statewide annual objective. In order to meet or exceed the statewide annual objective, the number of students below proficient must be reduced by at least 10% from the previous year, and the subgroup must have made progress in all other indicators. This is known as *safe harbor*.

As outlined on the U.S. Department of Education website, a state achieves AYP through a three-step annual review process: (1) the state reaches AYP for each group of students, (2) the state meets its annual measurable achievement objectives for Local



Education Agency (LEA) attainment of English proficiency under Title III, and (3) the state starts with the third year of implementing Title 1, Part A and Title III, Part A. States must then determine if each district and the schools within that district are making improvements (even those not receiving Title 1 funds). Each Title 1 LEA within a state is required to review annually the progress of each Title 1 school and determine if AYP is being attained. The LEA must publish the results for parents, teachers, schools, and the community. Finally, the LEA must review the effectiveness of activities to provide parent involvement, professional development, and the other Title 1 activities.

**Deficiencies according to No Child Left Behind (NCLB).** The challenge is presented when a school does not make AYP. After review of the AYP requirements and the divisions of students in specific subgroups, the focus then turns to the AYP process and procedures in place when a school is not making AYP. If a school finds itself not making AYP one year, it has the next year to make the necessary improvements. If, after the second year, the school has not made enough improvements and is not attaining AYP, the school then goes into *high priority* status. Subsequently, beginning the third year, the state gets involved in the process. When the state is involved in implementing School Improvement Year 1, under an NCLB transfer, parents are allowed to take their children out of the struggling school and place them in a school making AYP. Each year the school continues to be unsuccessful at making the necessary gains, it becomes more involved in the school improvement process until finally, by the seventh year, a school that has not made AYP is fully reconstituted or restructured by the state. After a school has been identified as not reaching AYP, or “targeted,” the school must put procedures in

place to try to take itself off the list of schools not making AYP. During this process, assistance is provided to the school and its students in every effort to improve test scores.

Finally, under the accountability guidelines established by NCLB and described on the U.S. Department of Education website, states must publish a state report card annually consisting of disaggregated student achievement results by performance level; comparison between annual objectives and actual performance for each student group; percentage of students not tested; disaggregated 2-year trend data by subject and by grade tested; data on other indicators used to determine AYP graduation rates; performance of districts making AYP, including the number and names of schools identified for school improvement, professional qualifications of teachers, percent with provisional credentials, percent of classes not taught by highly qualified teachers, a comparison between high- and low-poverty schools, and optional information provided by the state. The information is available at the U.S. Department of Education's website (<http://www.ed.gov>). This site offers information regarding NCLB and other meaningful information including suggestions and links for administrators, teachers, parents, and students. Another helpful website for stakeholders involved in NCLB and specifically interested in how the state of Tennessee performs is the Tennessee Department of Education website (<http://www.tn.gov/education>). Both websites are also helpful for those in a school that is targeted, in high priority status, or in the process of being restructured. The guidelines for accountability are strict, but there are steps along the way and assistance offered to those willing to seek guidance.

**No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and funding.** There are two reasons why education leaders would adhere to such rigorous guidelines: (1) they believe this is what is best for children; (2) their ability to obtain funding is tied to their adherence of the guidelines. While the first may be true, the second is without a doubt a motivator for counties, districts, and states to comply with the NCLB guidelines. Title 1 grants which control NCLB policies are *big business* financially, both in quantity of funds and paperwork. This financial mountain became even more difficult to navigate with the introduction of Race to the Top grants which required states to compete for Title 1 funding (Fowler, 2009).

What can administrators do if they find themselves in the middle of such a comprehensive plan if they do not feel the reform is in the best interest of America's children? Fowler (2009) recommends three avenues of hope:

1. Education leaders should not launch a frontal attack on the concept of accountability—it is extremely difficult for people whose salaries are paid with public money and who operate schools and school systems using public money to sound credible when they object to standards and assessment; therefore, education leaders must be careful not to appear to oppose accountability in and of itself.
2. Rather than oppose the accountability system included in NCLB, education leaders should say that they support accountability, but believe that the NCLB form of it must be improved.

3. Education leaders should learn more about the foreign school systems with which American schools are often compared. (pp. 361-362)

Education leaders must be able to speak to the deficiencies in the policy and be willing to actively participate in finding alternative solutions to those inadequacies. Several ways that NCLB is limited in its approach include: (a) relying on a single measure of school success, which in turn can lead to (b) narrowing the curriculum, teaching to the tests, and cheating; (c) looking for growth for subgroups as they progress over the years; (d) rating schools that are making good progress, but still achieving below average on the test as failing; (e) failing to address other indicators such as attendance and drop-out rates; and (f) comparing American schools are to those in other countries which do not just use tests scores as an indicator of success (Fowler, 2009). Education leaders not willing to accept the status quo must become advocates of alternatives in politically savvy, positive, meaningful ways. Feeling passionately about what is best for children is essential; making logical methodical steps toward bringing about what is felt to be best regarding policy issues is the key.

**Closing thoughts regarding No Child Left Behind (NCLB).** Reform of America's public education system is nothing new. Individuals and groups have worked tirelessly for over 200 years to bring about the changes necessary to make our schools the best we have to offer children. This began with Horace Mann in the 19th century, and the influence of The Common Schools movement, and the nation's growing desire to standardize American education. Since The Common Schools movement, America's education system has undergone a list of reform initiatives, not the least of which was the

Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA). ESEA’s most recent revision came about through our current legislation structuring public education—NCLB passed in 2002. There have been a number of revisions to the law since 2002, including the most recently noted waivers passed in March 2012, and there are likely to be even more revisions to come. The increased demands for accountability and the call to provide equal education to all with equal outcomes are here to stay. Fowler (2009) states, “Education leaders should be involved in that debate at the local, state, and federal levels” (p. 88). This involvement cannot be left to those educational leaders who enjoy politics. All educational leaders must be at the forefront of navigating the journey in an age of accountability (Fowler).

### **Relevant Studies**

Considering the magnitude of the far-reaching effects of NCLB, there are thousands of studies that have been conducted exploring a given nuance of the policy’s existence. For the sake of time and clarity, a sampling of 15 dissertations were reviewed to help identify the gap to be filled by this study. Again, these are by no means all of the studies available on the subject, but this synopsis provides the background needed. The studies are grouped by aspects shared and are reported as follows.

**No Child Left Behind (NCLB) documents.** Two of the dissertations reviewed involved collecting data by exploring documents—Cole (2006) and Hall (2006) in their NCLB studies through The University of Tennessee. Cole (2006) conducted a content analysis of political structures and values by assessing state compliance documents from 16 states. Cole (2006) offered three conclusions: (1) the 16 states were not developing

accountability and teacher quality plans consistent with their historical political cultures in terms of compliance with NCLB; (2) there appeared to be a shift toward values that were more conservative and like a business model; and (3) the value of efficiency was preferred in state documents while the value of choice was preferred in federal documents. Hall (2006) conducted a qualitative study focused on how presidential influence impacted early childhood education initiatives. Cole collected data from presidential speeches and position papers and the transcripts of the NCLB debates in both houses of Congress. The data yielded the conclusion that there was influence from the President in both direction and substance of the reform effort evidenced by his two proposed early childhood reading programs included in the final bill. These two studies did not focus on principals, but both were examples of completely different choices of focus and data collection sources.

**No Child Left Behind (NCLB) subgroups.** Enfield (2008) and Banegas Pena (2009) studied the effects of NCLB on different subgroups, or types of students. Enfield conducted a case study of a mid-sized, urban-suburban school district in the Pacific Northwest. Enfield explored the effects of NCLB on equitable resources allocated for English Language Learners (ELL), Educationally Disadvantaged (ED), and Special Education (SPED) students. Enfield raised the question about funds being equal or equitable based on students' needs. He found that more funds were being allocated to support students' needs in these areas, and student achievement also reflected improvement for those subgroups (also noting that it could not be established whether more families would choose to send their children to schools with more diverse

demographics). Enfield concluded further research would need to be done to determine if the improvement noted from policies promoting equitable distribution of funds would be sustainable. Three necessities were listed in the conclusion of the study: district incentives must be district-driven and building owned; district leaders must be able to convey such policies effectively; and all stakeholders must be involved in the redistribution of resources.

Banegas Pena (2009) studied the effects of NCLB on principals to manage English Language Learners (ELL). Nine principals—three each from elementary, middle, and high schools—were selected based on recommendations from their superiors, and all but one of the nine self-reported that they were both transformational and transactional leaders. The principals were interviewed along with three teachers from each school. All were found to be extremely involved in curriculum support and supportive of the ELL teacher and students in the building. The principals agreed they felt they were able to manage the success of ELL students, but also agreed that some of the directives of NCLB limited them. Further, the principals unanimously agreed the law was flawed in the expectation that ELL students should complete tests in English.

**Principal stress and job satisfaction.** One of the studies reviewed looked at NCLB effects on principals personally. West (2010) conducted a qualitative study of the daily work lives of 21 principals from 10 states. The study explored the effects of stress and job satisfaction on principals since the inception of NCLB. The information gathered in the interview process was divided into three sections: (1) six characteristics of principal work life; (2) five contextual conditions that impact principals; and (3) stress

and fulfillment of the principalship. West emphasized the importance of listening to what principals voiced about their work lives; in fact, the study actually revealed health implications based on the work conditions reported by the principals interviewed. West observed that, even though the principalship was changing with increased accountability for student test performance, little was being done to change the barriers students faced. West concluded,

Unless these barriers are specifically addressed by states and the federal government, and Title I monies are not attached to student performance, there is no morality in the leadership of schools. Until politicians, lobbyists, and the testing industry put aside personal gain, engaging and relevant education for students will be shortchanged. (pp. 144-145)

**Aspects of principal leadership.** Four of the studies reviewed focused on aspects of principal leadership as affected by NCLB. These included studies published by Pitre (2003), Powell (2004), Gramling-Vasquez (2009), and Johnson (2011). These studies varied in composition, but each focused on an aspect of leadership. Pitre (2003) conducted a study that featured NCLB and how it had affected leadership in relation to teacher motivation. Pitre looked specifically at the Mississippi Student Achievement Improvement Act and NCLB. Powell (2004) conducted a study in three successful high-risk schools in Virginia by surveying the teachers about the principal's leadership in their respective schools. Some of the findings reported included the need for principal vision, a nurturing culture for teachers and students, and an emphasis on teaching the curriculum with teaching time protected.



Gramling-Vasquez (2009) explored how state report card ratings correlated to poverty rates and burnout in high school principals in South Carolina. As a way to define burnout, Gramling-Vasquez cited Maslach's three dimensions of burnout: Emotional Exhaustion, Depersonalization, and Personal Accomplishment. The study was open to all secondary high school principals across the state. Although only 50% of the targeted population participated, the results indicated moderate burnout in relation to Emotional Exhaustion and Depersonalization and high burnout regarding Personal Accomplishment (Gramling-Vasquez, 2009, p. 64).

Last in this group, Johnson (2011) studied the correlation between principal instructional leadership behavior and student academic achievement. Johnson surveyed 251 high school principals in the state of Tennessee whose school had three years of data to draw from and used the Principal Instructional Management Rating Scale. The study of principal perceptions yielded no significant difference between instructional leadership behaviors of high-achieving and low-achieving schools or in high-performing and low-performing schools. However, a statistical significance was noted when data were combined for achievement and performance in four domains of instructional leadership: framing school goals, protecting instructional time, maintaining high visibility, and promoting professional development. Johnson (2011) concluded that the significance indicated that principals behaved differently in high-achieving, low-performing schools than principals of other schools. Johnson also observed the findings to reveal that "school principals did not overwhelmingly accept the school improvement process nor did they

completely understand it” (p.113). Understanding the process is critical if principals are to be the leaders of school improvement (Fullan, 2001; Johnson 2011).

**Principal perceptions.** The final six studies reviewed paralleled the current study in their being centered on the actual perceptions of principals in various settings. These settings were used to group the six studies in pairs. Pfeiffer (2006) and Davis (2011) focused their attention on secondary school principals. Fuller (2004) and Watson (2007) explored principal perceptions at the elementary level. Finally, McCullers (2009) probed principal perceptions in Florida, while Scandrett (2010) concentrated on principals in a rural school system.

The first two studies on principal perceptions were conducted at the secondary school level. Pfeiffer (2006) conducted a qualitative, multi-case study of three principals at Navajo high schools in Arizona. The data were collected through open-ended interviews of the principals, principal observations, documents from the schools, and teacher focus groups. Student achievement was measured using the Arizona Instrument to Measure Standards (AIMS). Conclusions and recommendations were offered based on policy, practice, and future research. Davis (2011) focused on all 541 public middle school and high school principals across the state of Tennessee. Conclusions included an increased amount of time spent on subjects that were tested and a decrease in the amount of time spent on non-tested subjects, classrooms, and student activities. In addition, high school principals reported agreement more than middle school principals in the areas of high-stakes testing’s motivating previously difficult-to-motivate students, high-stakes tests as a fad, and high-stakes tests as an inaccurate measure of what ELL students might

know. Contrary to middle school principals, high school principals indicated that, in all categories, their schools spent more time on areas not covered on state-mandated tests.

The second pair of studies focused on principal perceptions at the elementary school level. Fuller (2004) conducted a qualitative study of principal perceptions at six elementary schools in Virginia. The data were collected through interviews, e-mail correspondence, and some follow-up discussions. Fuller used a cross-case analysis to identify similar experiences among principals. The principals reported feeling they were adequately prepared to implement NCLB, but there was concern in a variety of areas (e.g., funding, school choice, teacher/paraprofessional preparation, quality, poverty of students, level of parental understanding, and altered job descriptions). The study concluded that quantitative studies only gave a snapshot of what was going on in a school. There needed to be more qualitative explorations into the effects of such policy. Numbers alone did not allow others the opportunity to understand and experience what those working to make a difference in the lives of young people actually did on a daily basis. Watson (2007) also conducted research that focused on elementary principals, but centered it on elementary school principals of urban schools. Qualitative data were collected through interviews, site observations, and written documents. Several themes emerged: a lack of knowledge, NCLB accountability, instructional leadership, and voice. The author noted two additional themes: the lack of central office support and the need for solid principal supervisory relationships. Watson also commented on the need for a voice to be given and experiences shared among those leading the mandates and accountability efforts in our elementary schools.

The final pair of studies concentrated on principal perceptions as well. McCullers (2009) surveyed principals in the state of Florida regarding their beliefs that the state and federal goals were actually attainable. McCullers collected data from 112 principals. The conclusions revealed that 83.8% of respondents felt the state goals were attainable, while only 20.7% considered the federal goals unattainable (McCullers, p. iii). McCullers spoke to how important it was that the majority of principals believed in the state goals, but, on the other hand and just as loudly, how significant it was that principals tended to view the NCLB goals as unattainable. The final study for review looked at principals' perceptions of NCLB in a rural school system. Scandrett (2010) selected principals from one rural school district in a southeastern state to participate in a case study. These principals were questioned about how they recruited, hired, trained/inducted new hires, and dismissed teachers—all based on the increased demands of NCLB on principals to hire and retain highly qualified staff.

**Summary of relevant studies.** The 15 studies summarized represent a sampling of the hundreds that have been conducted and written since NCLB was signed into law. The studies selected were chosen to offer a sampling of what has been the focus of such studies in recent years including collection of data from related NCLB documents, principals' stress and job satisfaction, aspects of leadership, and the perceptions of principals in a variety of settings. Not included here are many studies that looked at the implications of NCLB for teachers in varying aspects, how the policy affected different subgroups, and effects on tested and non-tested subjects.

**Other relevant searches.** After identifying the preceding studies that centered on NCLB, the researcher went on to explore more specific investigations into NCLB that might be similar to this proposed study. A search in ProQuest for doctoral dissertations that featured NCLB and principals' perceptions initially generated a list of 148 studies; then, limiting the index terms in an advanced search narrowed the list down to 44 studies. From reading through the 44 titles (and abstracts, if needed), the researcher discovered 16 studies that probed some aspect of NCLB that might relate to her own study. In addition, the researcher searched ProQuest for doctoral dissertations that explored principals' perceptions while implementing a Delphi design. Initially, 176 studies were identified and then reduced to 15 studies by combing the titles and abstracts (as with the earlier search) and restricting the index terms. A search for Delphi studies focusing on some aspect of the principalship produced 28 studies dating back to 1983 that, when narrowed down to those published in 2004 and later, the list decreased to five studies. In continuing to look for like-minded studies, the researcher found that Perkins (1998) and LaBelle (1990) implemented a Delphi design. Perkins (1998) was guided by the sensemaking theory, while LaBelle (1990) explored development of an inventory to describe principals as instructional leaders. Through multiple searches approached from each of the key terms that contributed to this study, no other study was located that explored principals' perceptions of the effects of NCLB on their abilities to be agents of change at the building level; no other study was found that was guided by the theoretical framework of the sensemaking theory and that implemented a modified Delphi technique. No search result fulfilled all three parameters; there appeared to be a significant gap in the research

that might be filled to some extent by this study. At this point, it is important to take a more intensive look at this study's modified Delphi technique design, the history of the Delphi technique, and the general design of a Delphi study.

### **Modified Delphi Technique**

The purpose of this study was to explore the effects of NCLB on principals in the field and gather recommendations for change in the future. In order to accomplish this, the opinions of experts needed to be gathered. As the Delphi technique had a history of being used by policymakers to create a nationwide advice community on government issues (Linstone & Turoff, 1975), it promised to be a natural fit for this study, but with certain modifications applied—a *modified Delphi technique*. The following is a brief description of the history of the Delphi technique and the details of the Delphi study design, including rationale for its modification.

**History of the Delphi method.** The first Delphi study was conducted in the 1960s by Project RAND, research contracted by the United States Air Force. The purpose of the experiment was to collect expert opinions on the best methods to manage a variety of issues "...from long-term threat assessment to forecasts of technological and social development" (Dalkey, 1969, p. iii). According to Dalkey, the corporation's philosophy supporting the use of this type of methodology was based on the premise, "Two heads are better than one" (p. v). Therefore, collecting opinions from experts in the field regarding decision-making would be beneficial, especially when it related to complex topics involving experts across the nation or even the globe. Dalkey goes on to explain that Delphi studies have three features: (a) anonymous response, (b) iteration and controlled

feedback, and (c) statistical group response. Based on the idea that collective consensus from a group of experts is the key to unraveling a myriad of complex issues and combined with the three main features of the employed methodology, this groundbreaking Project RAND study laid the groundwork for an abundance of future research conducted in a variety of fields including, but not limited to, health care, technology, a means for developing research instruments, and education at all levels (Dalkey, 1969).

As the use of the Delphi method increased, the interest in its complexity, application, and benefits also grew. For example, Harold A. Linstone and Murray Turoff became a well documented research team that wrote about and employed the methodology extensively. In *The Delphi Method: Techniques and Applications*, Linstone and Murray (1975) explored the methodology in great depth. In the foreword, Olaf Helmer explained using the Delphi method "... to supply 'soft' data in the social sciences and to provide decisionmakers with ready access to specialized expertise, are of great potential importance" (1975, p. xx). The reason this researcher implemented this design was to gather opinions about current policy being implemented in the field from a panel of experts and provide decisionmakers with the information obtained to guide future reauthorizations of the policy.

The methodology was defined as being designed to provide effective, yet anonymous, group communication in order to address a complex problem; the Delphi method was noted as especially beneficial when experts were geographically unable to meet face to face to offer input and guidance. Linstone and Turoff (1975) explained three types of Delphi studies: (a) conventional, (b) real-time, and (c) policy. Regardless of

which type chosen, studies were to have as many as four rounds of data collection: Round 1 exploring the subject; Round 2 understanding the groups' views of the subject; Round 3 checking to determine if there was significant agreement or disagreement; and Round 4 allowing the panel as a whole to explore the input previously submitted and give any final comments.

According to Linstone and Turoff (1975), the Delphi method is suitable to a variety of applications in government planning, business, and industry, as well as in a host of other studies. Regarding government planning in particular, the notion is expounded upon in that "...a policy question is defined here as one involving vital aspects, such as goal formation for which there are no overall experts, only advocates and referees" (p. 75). Haskins further described the process when "... experts are asked to estimate the quantitative value of a particular policy's effect on some variable" (Miller & Salkind, 2002, p. 71). Haskins continued with the opinions of individuals being shared with the group. A second round of the quantitative estimates was made with the hope of leading to a clear consensus of the experts. "The underlying assumption being that convergence among experts is the best way to estimate the value of a variable that is not well understood" (Miller & Salkind, p. 71).

With consideration given to educational policy as the basis of the study, NCLB's effect on administrators as agents of change, and the opportunity to identify valuable recommendations for NCLB's reauthorization, a modified Delphi technique was selected for this study. Similar to a traditional Delphi study, a modified Delphi technique employs a number of rounds a purposive sampling of experts to offer opinions about a future event



and strive for consensus. One avenue of modification includes involving content experts to review synthesized material from literature and interviews. Another modification can include gathering information from an initial group of experts, synthesizing their input regarding a phenomenon, and then involving a second group of experts to accept or refute the opinions of the first group. According to Dalkey (1969), modifying the Delphi in this way can (1) improve the initial round response rate, (2) provide a solid grounding in previously developed work, (3) reduce the effects of bias due to group interaction by assuring anonymity and providing controlled feedback to participants, and (4) offer efficiencies in use of time and other resources.

Since the RAND corporation initially employed the Delphi technique in the 1960s, the methodology has been extensively reviewed. This not only included the insights shared by Dalkey (1969) and Linstone and Turoff (1975). In their assessment of the technique, Rowe and Wright (1999) acknowledged a number of other researchers who had evaluated the Delphi technique and its effectiveness (Hill & Fowles, 1975; Lock, 1987; Parente & Anderson-Parente, 1987; Rowe, Wright, & Bolger, 1991; and Steardt, 1987). Although the history has been abbreviated here, it provides an understanding of the methodology itself and a sound basis for the researcher's decision to employ the technique in conducting this study.

**Design of a Delphi study.** A Delphi study, or technique, is conducted when the researcher wants to obtain information from a group of participants that will assist in problem-solving, planning, and decision-making (Brewer, 2007). Ludwig (1997) expanded upon this definition, observing that the Delphi technique combined both

quantitative and qualitative opportunities through oral and/or written accounts that allowed respondents to anonymously share expertise that might not otherwise be shared due to lack of proximity. Adding to this, Clayton (1997) suggested that the Delphi technique equipped decisionmakers with an easy-to-use, thorough approach to collecting and broadcasting key information pertinent to a topic of interest. Based on the importance of their input, therefore, participants for a Delphi study are selected purposively rather than randomly, contrary to what is done in many solely quantitative studies. When individuals are selected to become members of a panel of experts, these prospective participants are then invited to participate in the study itself. In order to better understand a Delphi study, it is helpful to look at the steps in conducting such a study.

**Details of the Delphi technique.** Delphi studies typically consist of two to four rounds of input from panel participants. Participants are selected based on their expertise, their knowledge, and experience regarding the topic of interest. According to Brewer (Salkind, 2007), a recommended panel size comprises 12 to 15 participants; however, panels can range from as few as 3 to hundreds of participants, depending upon the topic. As a rule of thumb, a response rate of 70% or higher is acceptable for the results of each round to be considered generalizable (Salkind, 2007, p.241). Figure 1 portrays a flowchart of a Delphi study.

As a research design method, Delphi studies have strengths and weaknesses (Brewer, 2007; Jenkins & Smith, 1994). The advantages and disadvantages for implementing a Delphi technique are listed in Table 2. Although the disadvantages may seem to outweigh the advantages, the Delphi technique has proven to be beneficial in

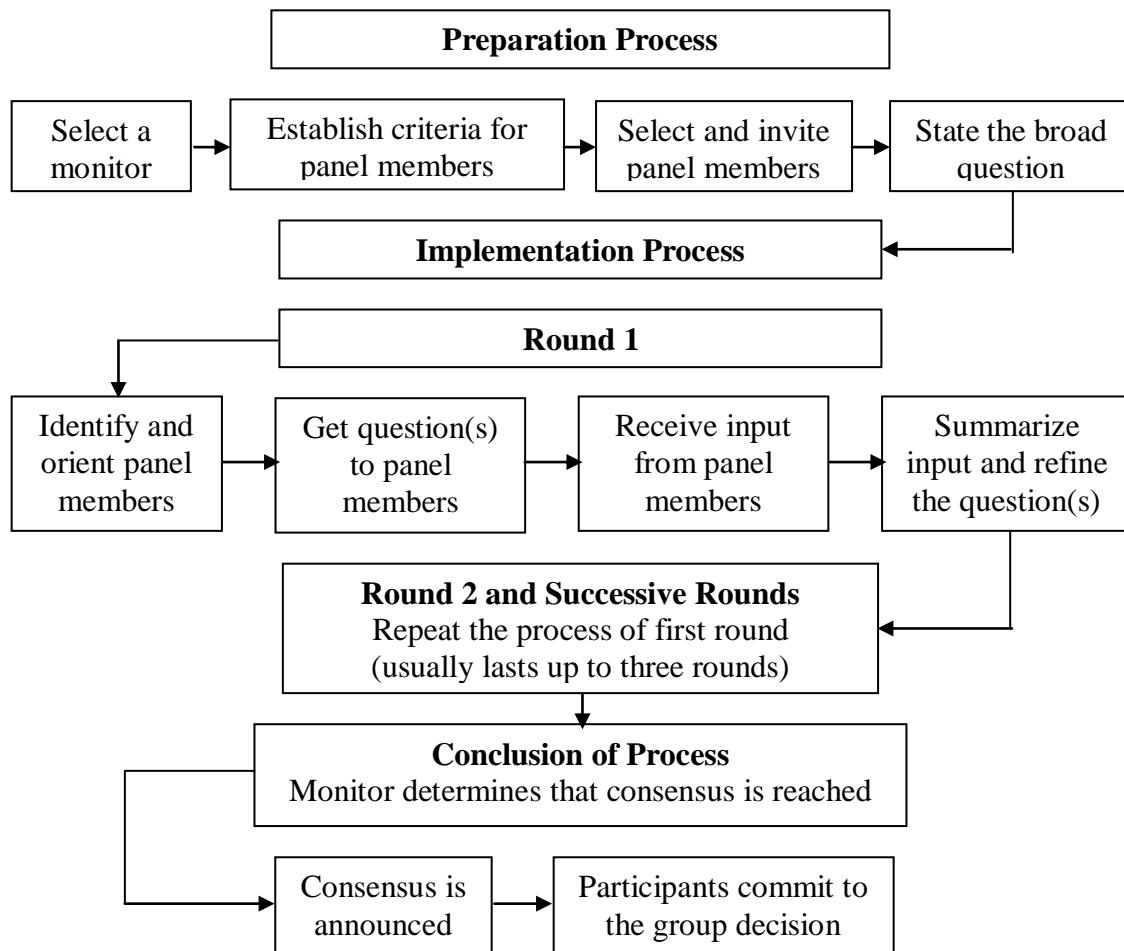


Figure 1. Delphi technique flowchart (Brewer, 2007, p. 242, with permission).

Table 2

*Advantages and Disadvantages of a Delphi Study*

Advantages	Disadvantages
<p>Effective structure: The process allows participants to refine their original ideas resulting in high-quality decisions on complex issues.</p>	<p>Time expended: Time required to monitor participants, to transmit the information, and to cultivate retention of participants through the final round can become excessive.</p>
<p>Fiscal economy: There is little financial cost involved in conducting a conventional Delphi study.</p>	<p>Inadequacy as sole method: Critics challenge the Delphi as a sole method of inquiry if the process is inadequate for forecasting due to central tendency, bias, communication difficulties, ethical standards, and the need for trust, that is, (1.) forecast vs. foresight, (2.) consensus vs. coalition, and 3. consensus and morality).</p>
<p>Anonymity: Identification of participants is protected anonymous.</p>	<p>Uncertain results: Results can be reduced to nonproblematic samples with unvalidated measures that receive little careful analysis.</p>
<p>Efficient data collection: It allows for an efficient and rapid method to collect expert opinions.</p>	<p>Difficult standardization: The combination of qualitative and quantitative measures make it difficult to normalize procedures.</p>

addressing complex issues and social dilemmas. Nevertheless, the researcher must be mindful of the potential for obscuring the results through bias and must be prepared to defend and explain the process implemented.

## **Summary of Chapter 2**

The review of literature has covered a variety of related topics surrounding principals' perceptions of NCLB's effects on them as change agents, beginning with the importance of principals and the need for policy emphasizing that they be active in policymaking decisions at every level. Then, Spillane's theoretical framework, *sensemaking theory*, was investigated as a lens to view policy implementation and the belief that how principals make sense and apply the policy is a key component in successfully implementing national education policies at the local level. After a brief recount of the historical background of NCLB and related studies, the review shifted to the theoretical framework and the Delphi technique itself—its history and characteristics based on the pure Delphi methodology as originally conducted and expanded to include modifications later applied; studies that have demonstrated its advantages, disadvantages, and quality of results; and rationale explaining and justifying the researcher's decision to choose the modified Delphi technique as this study's research design.

Based on a review of dissertations currently in circulation, this was not the first time the question about principals' perceptions of NCLB had been asked. However, the researcher has not located a study asking that question of elementary, middle, and high school principals nationwide representing the wide spectrum of socio-economic levels throughout America. Also, the studies reviewed to date did not take principals to the next

step: how they would change the current legislation if given the opportunity. The researcher felt it was time these questions were asked in a nationwide, modified Delphi study approach to address this phenomenon and the apparent gap in the research. The following chapter details the methodology selected, unique to this type of study and well suited to augmenting what is understood about the ramifications of NCLB's implementation in the field in both breadth and depth.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Research Methodology and Procedures**

The purpose of this modified Delphi study was to explore the effects of NCLB on principals in the field and to realize the positive and negative effects it has had on their ability to be agents of change at a local level. The researcher wanted to provide a forum for the discussion of this phenomenon among experts in the field that would not otherwise be possible due to logistics, cost, and time. In addition, this discussion was expanded to include recommendations for the reauthorization of this law in the near future. Chapter 3 presents the study design; the research questions; procedures followed in selecting the panels of experts, conducting the two phases of the data collection process, and analyzing the data; instrumentation; the validity of the findings; and an overall summary of the methodological approach employed.

This study was intended to offer insight into the effects of educational policy created by politicians, yet implemented by principals in the field. This opportunity afforded by higher education research promised to be the perfect opportunity to seek input from experts in the field to shed light on the effects such policies had had at a local level. Through this collaborative effort, one possible intended outcome would be principals' advocating for effective changes to NCLB in light of the acknowledgment that the reauthorization had had daily implications affecting their work (Adler & Ziglio, 1996; Dahl, 1974; Turoff, 1970). At the same time, the completed study could serve as a reference for policymakers faced with the monumental task of rewriting the reform.

## **Research Questions**

This modified Delphi study was designed to elicit the expert opinions of principals across the nation. The researcher sought to offer a forum for the discussion of the ramifications of NCLB and recommendations for future changes to the law. Through the use of a modified Delphi study and Spillane's (2004) sensemaking theory that provided the lens used to view this phenomenon, the following research questions were formulated to guide the data collection and provide experts in the field a voice regarding current educational legislation.

1. What effects has the current NCLB legislation had on you and your ability to be an agent of change in your school?
2. What recommendations for change to the law would you suggest in the next iteration of the legislation?

## **Research Design**

Due to the complex nature of the topic—effects of educational policy and recommendations for future reauthorizations of the policy, a modified Delphi approach was selected as the study design, utilizing both quantitative and qualitative data collection procedures. As discussed earlier in Chapter 2's review of literature, the use of the Delphi technique had come to be a frequent choice in gathering policymaker viewpoints on government issues (Linstone & Turoff, 1975).

With some modification to facilitate collecting data from experts in the field, the Delphi technique appeared to offer a good fit for this study in terms of the focus on education policy, principals' perspectives on NCLB's effect on their being agents of



change, and principals' recommendations on reauthorization of the law. It should be noted that NCLB had already been implemented, and 12 years had passed since its most recent reauthorization. The initial phase of the study began 10 years since the last reauthorization, and the study was meant to capture participant opinions about the policy as it was first designed (i.e., the waivers and multiple changes since then have not been incorporated into the depiction of the policy). Miller and Salkind (2002) referred to this as a policy analysis implemented to consider policy alternatives.

In this case, rather than having participants raise the issues surrounding the policy to be explored, this *modified* Delphi technique was designed to begin with specific research questions that would give direction to the discussion. Then, in order to address the research questions posed, the alternatives were to be solicited from the panel of experts rather than suggested to them. Another modification involved including different groups of participants in the two phases rather than using the same group of participants throughout. All communication was to be electronic, thereby ensuring anonymity through identification codes assigned by PsychData, the online survey service employed. With the decision on the study design founded on related published studies, the modified Delphi technique approach selected was expected to involve collecting participants' feedback that was controlled, to assure anonymity, and to minimize the bias that might otherwise occur through a group's interaction.

### **Study Population and Sample Selection**

Data collection in a Delphi study entails information provided by experts in the field. In the field of educational leadership, principals were considered to represent

appropriate candidates for experts in the field of educational leadership, especially if they had been recognized for their knowledge and administrative abilities. For this study in particular, principals had dealt with implementing NCLB and were likely to have opinions and recommendations on the law based on actual experience. To identify those principals, the population was defined as the membership in two, prominent, national professional organizations. A homogeneous sampling (Creswell, 2008) was drawn from that population, based on award recipient information for 2009-2011 posted on the respective organizational websites as explained below. Honoree names and school affiliations were directly available from the sites; if the email addresses were not included, they were found by way of websites for the schools they represented.

1. The National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP; 2013) annually recognizes elementary and middle school principals for exceptional leadership in the field with the National Distinguished Principal Award. Principals are selected in public and private schools in each state across the nation, including the U.S. Department of Defense Office of Educational Activity and the U.S. Department of State Office of Overseas Schools. From 2009 through 2011, 187 principals received this award.
2. The National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) presents its State Principal of the Year Award annually to recognize outstanding middle and high school principals in each state, including the District of Columbia and the Department of Defense Education Activity. From 2009 through 2011, 261 principals received this award.

Combining the information on the recipients of these awards and their related demographics resulted in a list totaling 448 participants. Table 3 displays a breakdown of the number of national and state honorees by award received and year, along with the corresponding combined total. Table 4 presents a similar breakdown showing the gender of the recipients and the type of school they served as principals. In the case of the NAESP recipients, 17 of their schools varied from the traditional elementary, middle, and high schools. They are classified in the *Other* column. The consolidated list was used to facilitate selection of panels of experts for the two phases of the study.

From the 448 possible participants identified, 60 were selected to participate in Phase 1 of the modified Delphi study. From the remaining 388 participants, more than 300 principals were invited to participate in Phase 2 of the study. The number of possible participants was reduced due to possible retirements, missing or unidentifiable email addresses, departures from the field, and deaths.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

Using a two-phased, modified Delphi technique, data were collected from expert principals in the field regarding their perceptions of the effect of policy on their ability to be agents of change and possible recommendations for the pending reauthorization of the law. This inductive data collection process was conducted in two distinct phases in order to elicit a rich response of expert opinions. The Figure 2 flowchart of the study design depicts the researcher's intent to address principals' perceptions regarding NCLB and the methodology employed to accomplish this purpose. Specific components of the flowchart are discussed in detail in succeeding sections.

Table 3

*National and State Principal Award Honorees 2009-2011 by Award, Number, and Year*

Award	Year	Number
National Distinguished Principal	2009	61
	2010	62
	2011	64
State Principal of the Year	2009	88
	2010	86
	2011	87
Combined Award Total	2009	149
	2010	148
	2011	151

Table 4

*National and State Principal Award Honorees 2009-2011 by Award, Year, Gender, and Type of School*

Award	Year	Gender		Type of School			
		Male	Female	Elementary	Middle	High	Other
National Distinguished Principal	2009						
	2010	124	63	154	16		17
	2011						
State Principal of the Year	2009						
	2010	185	76		120	141	
	2011						
Combined Award Total	2009						
	2010	309	139	154	136	141	17
	2011						

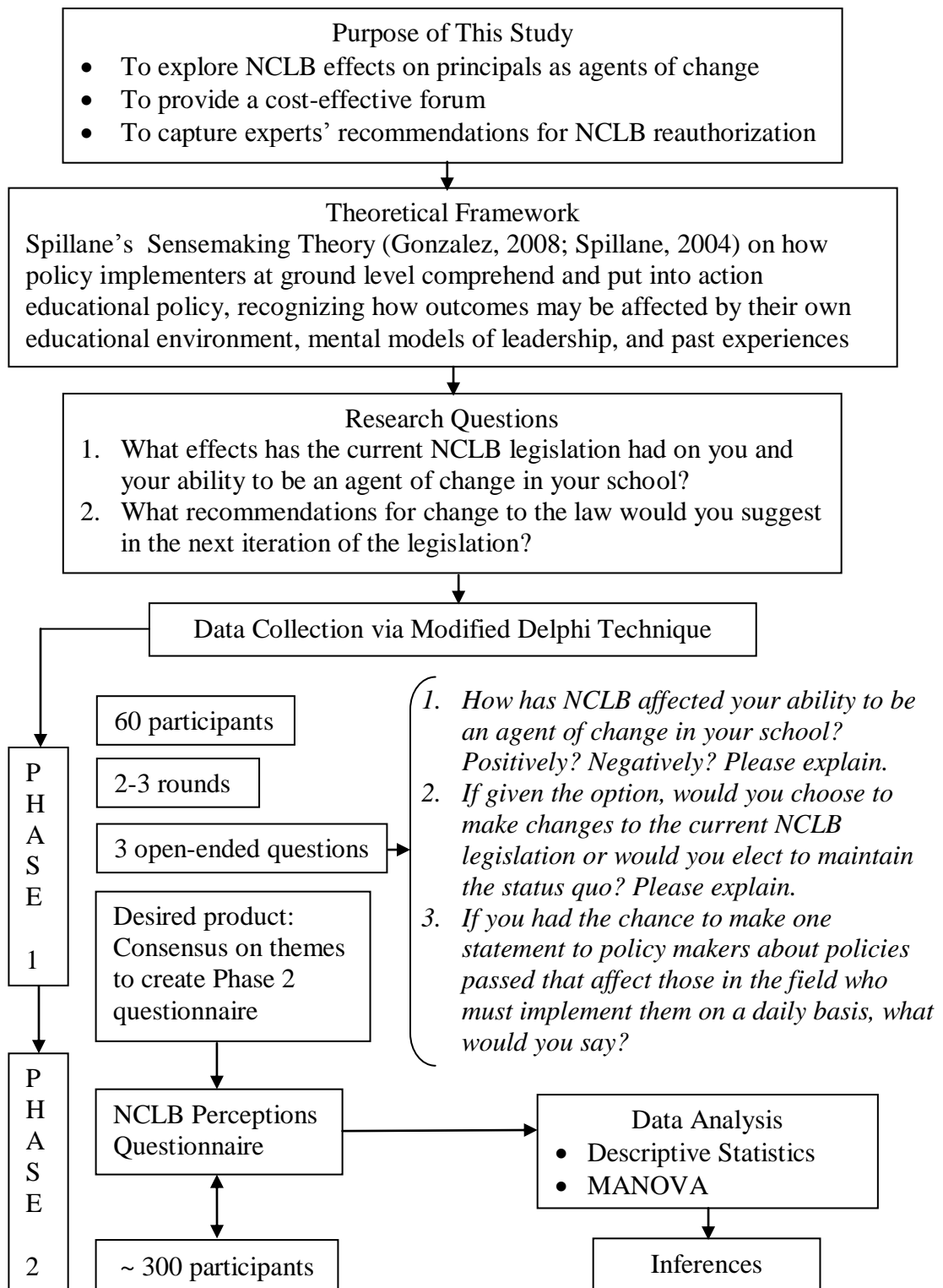


Figure 2. Delphi technique flowchart (Brewer, 2007, p. 242, with permission).

**Phases of the study.** This study was conducted in two phases, with analysis of participants' input at the end of each phase to assess for themes and to look for consensus and disagreements among participant responses. Phase 1 used a modified Delphi technique offering participants three open-ended questions for feedback. These questions were sent out to 60 public school principals across the United States. A second round of responses was then solicited to confirm or deny consensus from participants on their initial responses. Participants were invited to participate in the study and in both rounds. When Phase 1 was completed, Phase 2 of the study was carried out using a questionnaire developed from the responses provided during Phase 1. The questionnaire was then sent out to over 300 public school principals across the nation for their feedback on the information gathered during Phase 1. More detailed procedures for each phase are outlined below.

*Phase 1 Modified Delphi technique data collection procedures.* Phase 1 was conducted in two rounds to gather qualitative responses to open-ended questions. The rounds are discussed in the following two sections, respectively.

*Round 1.* Round 1 involved asking three open-ended questions intended to generate a discussion regarding principals' perceptions of NCLB. The invitation to Round 1 was sent out to 60 principals honored in 2011. This included 20 principals from each K-12 level (elementary, middle, and high). The list of 60 principals comprised 35 males and 25 females, including one person from each of the 50 states and at least one additional participant was selected from each of the nine divisions of the United States.

Round 1 data collection procedural steps are listed below; Round 1 documents can be seen in Appendix A.

1. Send an initial invitation via the Internet which includes a link to Round 1. Include in the link the participant consent, a ten-item demographic survey, and the three open-ended questions.  

Question 1. How has NCLB affected your ability to be an agent of change in your school? Positively? Negatively? Please explain.

Question 2. If given the option, would you choose to make changes to the current NCLB legislation, or would you elect to maintain the status quo? Please explain.

Question 3. If you had the chance to make one statement to policymakers about policies passed that affect principals in the field who must implement them on a daily basis, what would you say?
2. Send subsequent emails to encourage participation.
3. Ask participants to send a return email to the researcher when they complete their input to establish the group of participants to contact for Round 1 and to distribute tokens to them.
4. Compile and analyze data; prepare questions for Round 2. Using QDA Miner 4, code Round 1 responses for themes. Rank order the themes with those most frequently mentioned listed first for Round 2 input from participants (Jenkins & Smith, 1994).

*Round 2.* In Round 2, participants were asked to review the responses from Round 1 and provide further clarity. They then responded to three additional questions derived from participant thoughts from Round 1. Based on the responses to the six questions from Round 2, a third round was determined to be unnecessary. Round 2 data collection procedural steps are listed below; related documents can be seen in Appendix B.

1. Send an initial invitation via the Internet which includes a link to Round 2.

Include in the link the participant consent, responses from Round 1 (based on coded themes) for consideration, and any additional open-ended questions.

Question 1. How has NCLB affected your ability to be an agent of change in your school? Positively? Negatively? Please explain.

Question 2. If given the option, would you choose to make changes to the current NCLB legislation, or would you elect to maintain the status quo? Please explain.

Question 3. If you had the chance to make one statement to policymakers about policies passed that affect principals in the field who must implement them on a daily basis, what would you say?

Question 4. Based on feedback from Round 1, the highest response rate was from question 3, which stated policymakers need to confer with educators before determining educational policies. How do principals in the field, busy implementing current policies, actively engage policymakers in meaningful discussions to facilitate this information?



Question 5. How do educators, some of the best in the field, stand together and make a powerful shift in how we are able to influence educational policies nationally and positively affect the lives of our nation's future leaders and students through public education locally?

Question 6. Are there any closing thoughts or questions you would like to share?

2. Send subsequent emails to encourage participation.
3. Ask participants to send a return email to the researcher when they complete their input so that responses can be collected and tokens distributed to them.
4. Compile and analyze data; prepare questionnaire for Phase Two. Using QDA Miner 4, code Round 2 responses for themes. Rank order the themes with those most frequently mentioned listed first. Develop the questionnaire from the themes derived from Phase 1 participant responses. Structure each item with potential responses arrayed along a 5-point Likert-type scale (ranging from *strongly agree* to *strongly disagree*) to gauge level of agreement by Phase 2 participants (Jenkins & Smith, 1994).

**Instrumentation.** Delphi studies conducted in the past (e.g., Gilbert, 2002; Neal, 1994; and Senyshyn, 2002) have used this process to develop an instrument and/or a pilot study for the instrument constructed. However, in this study, participants were asked to consider a policy that would be reauthorized in the near future. Responses received from the initial panel of experts contributed to creation of the NCLB Perceptions

Questionnaire, a 75-item, 5-point Likert-scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 2 = *disagree*, 3 = *neither agree nor disagree*, 4 = *agree*, and 5 = *strongly agree*) questionnaire for the Phase 2 data collection (as discussed in the next section). This questionnaire (displayed in Appendix C) was then used to gather further quantitative feedback from an additional panel of experts for this particular study; it was not intended for reuse as an instrument in other studies.

**Phase 2: Modified Delphi data collection procedures.** Phase 2 involved administering the NCLB Perceptions Questionnaire to see if Phase 2 participants (a separate group from the Phase 1 panels) supported or refuted the opinions expressed in Phase 1. Data analyses of the responses helped determine if any generalizable conclusions could be reached based on this two-phased process. Procedures followed in Phase 2 are detailed below.

Phase 2 of the study entailed taking the feedback collected from the Delphi study and creating a 5-point Likert-type scale questionnaire to send out to a second group of participants. Phase 2 data collection details are described below; related documents are located in Appendix C.

1. Send an initial invitation via the Internet which includes a link to Phase 2.  
Include in the link the participant consent, a ten-item demographic survey, and the NCLB Perceptions Questionnaire.
2. Send subsequent emails to encourage participation.
3. Ask participants to send a return email to the researcher when they complete their input so that tokens can be distributed to them.

4. Compile and analyze data.

### **Data Analysis**

This modified Delphi study utilized the qualitative and quantitative data collected as described above in identifying themes in principals' perceptions of NCLB, how the policy has affected their abilities to be agents of change, and their recommendations for future changes to the policy. The University of Tennessee Statistical Consulting Center assisted in performing the appropriate statistical testing and analyzing the results. Figure 3 provides an overview of data sources and data analysis for each round, followed by an explanation of the online resources (PsychData and QDA Miner) employed, the tokens used to increase participation in the study, and characteristics of each phase.

**PsychData.** PsychData is an on-line resource located at <http://www.psychdata.com>, the website developed by Dr. Ben Locke and David Keiser-Clark in 2001 to provide the capability to generate surveys for Internet-based research. The website offers services to create the survey from the researcher's design or the researcher can use the site to create the survey personally. The service issues a link for the researcher to embed in the email invitation for the study, and the participants click on the link if they choose to begin the study. The service then records the participants' responses, both qualitative and quantitative data, and stores the information for the researcher in a safe table approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB). When the data collection portion of the service is completed, the researcher can choose to run analyses using reports available on the website or export the data to another type of software if needed. The fees for this service include a monthly fee for an open survey,

<b>Research Question 1:</b> <i>What effects has the current NCLB legislation had on you and your ability to be an agent of change in your school?</i>	<b>Research Question 2:</b> <i>What recommendations for change to the law would you suggest in the next iteration of the legislation?</i>
<b>Phase 1</b>	
<b>Round 1 Questions</b>	<b>Round 2 Questions</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How has NCLB affected your ability to be an agent of change in your school? Positively? Negatively? Please explain.</li> <li>2. If given the option, would you choose to make changes to the current NCLB legislation or would you elect to maintain the status quo? Please explain.</li> <li>3. If you had the chance to make one statement to policymakers about policies passed that affect principals in the field who must implement them on a daily basis, what would you say?</li> </ol> <div style="display: flex; border: 1px solid black; height: 150px; width: 250px; margin-left: 154px; margin-top: 10px;"></div> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. Based on feedback from Round 1, the highest response rate was from question 3, which stated policymakers need to confer with educators before determining educational policies. How do principals in the field, busy implementing current policies, actively engage policymakers in meaningful discussions to facilitate this information?</li> <li>5. How do educators, some of the best in the field, stand together and make a powerful shift in how we are able to influence educational policies nationally and positively affect the lives of our nation's future leaders, students, through public education locally?</li> <li>6. Are there any closing thoughts or questions you would like to share?</li> </ol>	
<b>Phase 2</b>	
Analysis of Quantitative Data from Questionnaire Responses: Descriptive Statistical Analysis * * * Factor Analysis * * * MANOVA	
Positive Effects of NCLB # 1-14 Negative Effects of NCLB # 15-27	Recommendations for Change # 28-39 Thoughts for Policymakers # 40-52 Engaging Policymakers # 53-63 Closing Thoughts # 64-75
Analysis of Qualitative Data from Open-ended Questions: QDA Miner 4	
What additional or concluding thoughts would you contribute regarding the effects of NCLB on you to be an agent of change in your building?	What additional or concluding thoughts would you contribute to policymakers?

Figure 3. Data sources and analyses.

cost per the number of questions asked and number of participants anticipated, and set-up fees if the researcher wants to include the data specialists to create the actual survey. This researcher chose this website for the survey design and implementation of this study due to the factor of time, the professional quality of the survey aesthetics, and the ability to analyze and/or export data to be analyzed upon completion of the data collection. Even though PsychData proved helpful in survey design, qualitative and quantitative data collection, and quantitative data analysis, the researcher used QDA Miner 4 for the qualitative data analysis.

**QDA Miner 4.** QDA Miner 4 is a qualitative data analysis software package used to analyze participant responses to the open-ended questions in both Phase 1 and Phase 2. The data were exported from PsychData.com and converted into Word documents to be uploaded into QDA Miner 4. The responses were grouped by question, and each set of questions was coded for themes. The themes were then rank ordered by frequency. The software offered quantitative feedback on the themes derived from participant responses and based on the researcher's coding efforts. In other words, it provided bases for comparison of participants' perceptions regarding a given topic.

**Tokens.** The use of tokens to encourage participant interest in participating in a study has been held as a debatable practice; however, the committee agreed upon allowing the researcher to use tokens to encourage participant participation. The parameters established and the actual implementation varied throughout the data collection stages. Initially, the researcher intended to offer \$25.00 Amazon gift cards to each participant upon the completion of both Round 1 and Round 2 of Phase 1. However,

as months passed, and participation was not what had been hoped for, the researcher changed the parameters of the offer and increased the amount to \$25.00 per round per participant. In addition, the researcher, after assessing the challenges experienced in Phase 1, offered five \$50.00 Amazon gift cards to Phase 2 participants if they responded by the given deadline. In light of the responses received from those participants who did choose to take part in the study, the researcher considered the value of the perceptions they shared to be well worth the cost.

**Phase 1—Round 1.** Participant responses to three open-ended questions formed the baseline of information that guided the discussion of NCLB among the expert panel members. The researcher grouped participant responses per question, converted the lists to Word documents, and input the responses into QDA Miner 4 to code for themes. When the responses to each question were coded, the themes were ranked by frequency. These themes were used to prepare follow-up questions for Round 2. Participants were asked to review the initial responses to the three open-ended questions and offer feedback. In addition, three additional open-ended questions based upon participant responses from Round 1 were added to Round 2.

**Phase 1—Round 2.** Participant responses for each of the original questions from Round 1 and for the three additional questions added to Round 2 were collected and compiled. The researcher grouped the responses by question, converted the lists to Microsoft Word documents, and uploaded the responses into QDA Miner 4 to code for themes. The coded themes were ranked by frequency, and these themes were used to prepare the NCLB Perceptions Questionnaire to be used in Phase 2.

**Phase 2.** Participant responses to the NCLB Perceptions Questionnaire were collected using PsychData and then exported into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. The quantitative responses were then uploaded into Statistical Program for the Social Science (SPSS, Version 20), and initially a descriptive statistical analysis was conducted. This allowed the researcher to compare Phase 2 participant responses to Phase 1 participant responses using the mean and standard deviation as the basis for the comparison per question and for the questionnaire as a whole. A mean comparison grouped items that participants agreed upon most to least, and a discussion of each level followed. Next, a factor analysis of participant responses was conducted to reduce the number of items being compared based on underlying variables. The variables could then be compared based means and level of reliability. According to Garrett-Mayer (2006), an exploratory factor analysis includes the following:

1. Collect and explore data; choose relevant variables
2. Extract initial factors (via principal components)
3. Choose number of factors to retain
4. Choose estimation method; estimate model
5. Rotate and interpret
  - a. Decide if changes need to be made (e.g., drop item[s], include item[s])
  - b. Repeat 4 and 5
6. Construct scales and use in further analysis (p. 53)

When the factor analysis was conducted, the researcher was able to compare underlying variables using the statistical mean and measure the internal consistency based on the Cronbach's alpha (Institute for Digital Research and Education [IDRE],

2006). The Cronbach's alpha measures consistency, or "how closely related a set of items are as a group" (IDRE, 2006, p. 1).

One final analysis of the questionnaire was conducted using the themes explored in the factor analysis to compare participant responses based on different demographic variables. A *t*-test could have been conducted on the independent variable of gender because it comprised only two values (i.e., male or female). However, for the other demographic variables, there were multiple values to test for possible influence on the patterning of response on the dependent variables (Carey, 1998). Therefore, MANOVAs were conducted to explore whether demographic differences were significant in the comparison of participant responses. According to Carey (1998), the "purpose is to explore how independent variables influence some patterning of response on the dependent variables" (p. 1). Six of the demographic items were compared with themes explored in the factor analysis that were based upon demographic differences. For each demographic variable, several multivariate tests were conducted and reported to demonstrate whether a statistically significant relationship existed between the variables and the themes.

Finally, the two open-ended questions embedded in the questionnaire were grouped by question and converted to Microsoft Word documents. The responses were uploaded into QDA Miner 4 to code for themes. Combining the qualitative and quantitative input from Phase 2 participants, the researcher strived to compare and contrast themes established in Phase 1. In addition, the researcher reviewed the input



from participants as a whole to glean any overarching insights offered by panel experts on their perceptions of NCLB.

### **Summary of Chapter 3**

Chapter 3 described the modified Delphi technique design chosen for this study and outlined the procedures used for data collection and analysis purposes, all guided by the theoretical framework established in Chapter 2 and the two research questions. The procedures covered selection of the study participants, the steps taken to develop the NCLB Perceptions Questionnaire, the iterative nature of the two-phased approach to data collection, and the data analyses performed, including the electronic sources employed. At appropriate junctures, further information on the Delphi design and its methodology was presented. In conclusion, the benefit of using a modified Delphi study yielded a wealth of rich qualitative responses from Phase 1, and Phase 2 provided additional opportunity for a quantitative review of the themes identified in Phase 1. Chapter 4 reports the findings from Phase 1 and Phase 2 of the study.

## Chapter 4

### Results and Findings

This study was conducted to explore principals' perceptions of NCLB and their recommendations for future reauthorizations of the law. The data collection activities gave experts in the field the opportunity to share their understanding of a public education policy as implemented at a local/building level. Data were collected in two phases in order to capture initial thoughts by a smaller panel of experts via a Delphi technique consisting of two rounds. Then, the researcher used the NCLB Perceptions Questionnaire (displayed in Appendix C) to collect additional data from a larger panel of experts in order to support or refute the initial group's opinions.

Data collected during Rounds 1 and 2 of Phase 1 were analyzed using QDA Miner 4. Participants' initial responses were coded based on themes, ranked by frequency, and presented for a second time to the respondents for further input. Responses from Phase 1 were used to create the NCLB Perceptions Questionnaire. Responses to the questionnaire were tested by item using mean and standard deviation followed by a factor analysis to compare underlying variables. MANOVA testing allowed for examining participant responses grouped by underlying variables and comparing them with the independent demographic variables selected earlier.

Chapter 4 now presents the results of the data collection for each phase and round of the study and the data analyses performed. These results will be discussed in Chapter 5 in terms of their implications for future research.

## **Results of Phase 1**

Phase 1 consisted of two rounds of qualitative data collection. Round 1 participants responded to three open-ended questions. Their responses were coded using qualitative software, QDA Miner 4, to identify emergent themes suggested in the principals' perceptions of NCLB. With the coded themes as a baseline, Round 2 afforded the same panel of experts a second opportunity to offer further clarifying feedback. The intended goal of this phase was to collect principals' opinions and to garner consensus on a variety of themes presented before proceeding to Phase 2.

**Results of Round 1.** The initial Round 1 invitation was sent out to 60 potential participants the third week of June 2012. Despite multiple reminders, only three responses had been completed by the deadline set in July 2012. The invitation was extended two more times with multiple reminders; participant compensation was increased to \$25.00 per round rather than \$25.00 for participating in both rounds. After receiving the additional incentive, 16 people at least started the endeavor; of these, 14 (23% of the initial 60 potential participants) completed both the demographic and open-ended components by September 2012.

**Results of Phase 1 demographic survey.** For the 14 respondents to the three open-ended questions posed in Round 1, their responses to the accompanying Demographic Survey showed all to be white males between the ages of 35 and 61 (average age 50). These expert panelists reported more than five years' experience as principals, not including the 6-20 or more years of experience in the classroom they had accumulated prior to becoming administrators. They had earned no less than a master's

degree, and many had attained education beyond a master's. More than half of the principals were from high schools, while the other panel members represented administrators from elementary and middle schools. The panel of experts worked in schools that ranged in size from under 500 to over 1,500 students (average size 830). The principals served in rural and suburban communities equally; however, none of the principals reported actually working in an urban school, per se. These 14 respondents represented the four regions of the United States: Northeast, 4; Midwest, 4; West, 5, and South, 1. Table 5 displays participant demographic characteristics as self-reported in the Demographic Survey conducted in Phase 1.

Throughout the study, the two, overarching research questions influenced all the subordinate questions posed at relevant stages. As a reminder, the two questions are repeated here.

Research Question 1: What effects has the current NCLB legislation had on you and your ability to be an agent of change in your school?

Research Question 2: What recommendations for change to the law would you suggest in the next iteration of the legislation?

At this point, participants were asked the three open-ended questions below about their perceptions of the effects of NCLB. Question 1 emanated from Research Question 1; Questions 2 and 3, from Research Question 2.

Table 5

*Phase I Demographic Survey Data*

Demographic Characteristic	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<i>Age (n = 14)</i>			
35-44	4	28.6%	28.6%
45-54	5	35.7%	64.3%
55-64	5	35.7%	100.0%
65-74	0	0%	100.0%
<i>Race/Ethnicity (n = 16)</i>			
<i>(Check all that apply)</i>			
Black/African American	0	0%	-
White	16	100.0%	-
Hispanic/Latino	0	0%	-
Asian/Pacific Islander	1	6.3%	-
Native American/Alaskan Indian	0	0%	-
<i>Gender (n = 14)</i>			
Male	14	100%	100.0%
Female	0	0%	100.0%
<i>K-12 Ed. prior to... (n = 15)</i>			
0-5	1	6.7%	6.7%
6-10	6	40.0%	46.7%
11-15	3	20.0%	66.7%
16-20	2	13.3%	80.0%
21-25	1	6.7%	86.7%
26-30	1	6.7%	93.3%
30+	1	6.7%	100.0%
<i>Yrs. Exp. K-12 Admin. (n = 16)</i>			
0-5	0	0%	0%
6-10	6	37.5%	37.5%
11-15	3	18.8%	56.3%
16-20	3	18.8%	75.0%
21-25	3	18.8%	93.8%
26-30	1	6.3%	100.0%
30+	0	0%	100.0%

Table 5. Continued.

Demographic Characteristic	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<b>Highest Degree (<i>n</i> = 16)</b>			
BS	0	0%	0%
MS	3	18.8%	18.8%
MS+	11	68.8%	87.5%
EdS	1	6.3%	93.8%
PhD/EdD	1	6.3%	100.0%
<b>Geographic Setting (<i>n</i> = 16)</b>			
Rural	7	43.8%	43.8%
Urban	0	0%	43.8%
Suburban	7	43.8%	87.5%
Other	2	12.5%	100.0%
<b>Age Group Served (<i>n</i> = 16)</b>			
Elementary	3	18.8%	18.8%
Middle	4	25.0%	43.8%
High	9	56.3%	100.0%
<b>No. Students Served (<i>n</i> = 14)</b>			
1 - 500	4	28.6%	28.6%
501 - 1000	5	35.7%	64.3%
1001 - 1500	4	28.6%	92.9%
1501 - 2000	1	7.1%	100.0%
<b>Student Subgroups (<i>n</i> = 16)</b>			
<b>(Check all that apply)</b>			
Native American/Alaskan	9	56.3%	-
Native Asian Pacific Islander	6	37.5%	-
Black	13	81.3%	-
White	16	100%	-
Hispanic	12	75.0%	-
Economically Disadvantaged	15	93.8%	-
Limited English Proficiency	12	75.0%	-
Students with Disabilities	16	100.0%	-

1. How has NCLB affected your ability to be an agent of change in your school? Positively? Negatively? Please explain.
2. If given the option, would you choose to make changes to the current NCLB legislation, or would you elect to maintain the status quo? Please explain.
3. If you had the chance to make one statement to policymakers about policies passed that affect principals in the field who must implement them on a daily basis, what would you say?

The responses to each of the three questions were initially coded by hand and then additionally coded using QDA Miner 4 software to further explore the participants' viewpoints. When asked about the effect NCLB had on their ability to be agents of change within their buildings, 7 (50%) of the 14 principals responded positively; 7 (50%), negatively. When asked about changing or maintaining the status quo of the current NCLB legislation, all 14 (100%) principals responded to change the current legislation. For the final question, 13 out of 14 (92.9%) had many suggestions to share with education policymakers. Only 1 (7.1%) stated he would not make suggestions for change to policymakers. Although there was a wide range of reactions, 7 (50%) of the 14 principals agreed that policymakers must confer with educators in the field. Regarding Question 3 and challenges of the current legislation, one principal made a noteworthy statement that the key to educational change and success for students rested on how we as a nation addressed struggling students. From Round 1 responses, Table 6 lists the top three positive and negative effects; it summarizes changes needed and suggestions from principals to policymakers.

Table 6

*Round 1 Participant Responses*

Question	Most Frequent Responses	% Agreed
1. How has NCLB affected your ability to be an agent of change in your school? Positively? Negatively? Please explain.	NCLB has caused change. [positive]	28.6%
	NCLB has increased the emphasis placed on data. [positive]	28.6%
	NCLB has heightened focus on accountability. [positive]	14.3%
	NCLB is a single dimensional measure. [negative]	28.6%
	The criteria of NCLB are unattainable. [negative]	25%
	NCLB has increased pressure. [negative]	14.3%
	2. If given the option, would you choose to make changes to the current NCLB legislation, or would you elect to maintain the status quo? Please explain.	There must be waivers from the current constraints.
NCLB should focus on student growth.		35.7%
The current goals are unattainable.		28.6%
3. If you had the chance to make one statement to policymakers about policies passed that affect principals in the field who must implement them on a daily basis, what would you say?	Policymakers should confer with educators.	50%
	Policymakers should keep in mind all the components of the job.	14%
	Policymakers must pass legislation based on research, not politics.	7%



In summary, the panel of experts reported that the effects of NCLB on their efforts to be an agent of change at their building were both positive and negative at an equal rate. Participants agreed that NCLB had brought about change (as a positive) by the increased emphasis on data and heightened focus on accountability. Equally voiced by experts were the negative effects of NCLB, including the fact that the current legislation was based on a single dimensional measure and on unattainable goals.

Participants unanimously agreed that changing the current legislation was a necessity as compared with maintaining the status quo. Changes proposed included waivers from the current unattainable constraints along with a shift in focus to individual student growth. In addition to the changes recommended, the panel of experts felt that the changes policymakers made to this and all education legislation must be done by conferring with principals in the field, taking into account all the aspects of the job, and basing decisions on research, not politics (including how the needs of struggling learners were addressed).

The purpose of this modified Delphi study was to give a voice to principals in the field regarding their perceptions of the current NCLB legislation and recommendations they would have for policymakers for the next revision of the legislation. Round 1 produced a baseline for this conversation among the panel of experts; the responses from this round became the framework for questions posed to the panel of experts in Round 2.

**Results of Round 2.** *The panel of 14 experts was established in the initial agreement to participate in Round 1. An email notifying the 14 participants of the second round with accompanying questions went out in March 2013. Even with the additional*

*compensation of \$25.00 for their Round 2 participation, it was not until June that the 12 responses were received. This constituted an 86% response rate. The 12 responses were coded using QDA Miner 4. The panel of experts was asked to review the groups' responses to the first three questions posed in Round 1:*

1. How has NCLB affected your ability to be an agent of change in your school? Positively? Negatively? Please explain.
2. If given the option, would you choose to make changes to the current NCLB legislation or would you elect to maintain the status quo? Please explain.
3. If you had the chance to make one statement to policymakers about policies passed that affect principals in the field who must implement them on a daily basis, what would you say?

When asked to review the panel responses to Question 1 from Round 1, the panel of experts expanded on their consensus regarding both the positive and negative effects of the policy on their ability to be an agent of change at the building level. When asked to reflect upon the panel's responses about changing or maintaining the status quo of the current NCLB legislation, 7 (58%) of the 12 principals were in favor of changing the current legislation. Regarding Question 3, principals agreed more readily with their Round 1 suggestions to share with education policymakers. Again, principals agreed that policymakers must confer with educators, that decisions must be based on research not politics, and that resources must be provided in order to meet mandates. In addition to their Round 1 responses, principals pointed out the societal issues that must be addressed

in order to meet NCLB mandates. Table 7 summarizes the responses made to the three questions in Round 2.

As in Round 1, the research questions influenced the subordinate questions posed in Round 2. As a reminder, the two research questions are repeated here.

Research Question 1: What effects has the current NCLB legislation had on you and your ability to be an agent of change in your school?

Research Question 2: What recommendations for change to the law would you suggest in the next iteration of the legislation?

In addition to the three initial questions from Round 1, three more open-ended questions were asked based on analysis of participant responses from Round 1. These final three questions were added to further explore principal perceptions on how to engage policymakers and influence educational policies passed nationally from a local level. Here, Research Question 1 influenced Round 2 Question 4; Research Question 2, Round 2 Questions 5 and 6. The Round 2 questions are as follows, beginning with Question 4:

4. Based on feedback from Round 1, the highest response rate was from Question 3 which stated policymakers need to confer with educators before determining educational policies. How do principals in the field, busy implementing current policies, actively engage policymakers in meaningful discussions to facilitate this information?
5. How do educators, some of the best in the field, stand together and make a powerful shift in how we are able to influence educational policies nationally

Table 7

*Round 2 Participant Responses*

Question	Most Frequent Responses	% Agreed
1. How has NCLB affected your ability to be an agent of change in your school? Positively? Negatively? Please explain.	NCLB has increased data collecting. [positive]	72.7%
	NCLB has increased the emphasis placed on individual student results. [positive]	63.6%
	NCLB has guided curricular change. [positive]	27.3%
	NCLB effects on how we address special education students. [negative]	27.3%
	NCLB has created more unfavorable public attitudes. [negative]	27.3%
	NCLB is unrealistic. [negative]	18.2%
	NCLB focuses on testing. [negative]	18.2%
	NCLB is based on political agendas. [negative]	18.2%
	NCLB increases accountability with diminishing funds and human resources. [negative]	18.2%
2. If given the option, would you choose to make changes to the current NCLB legislation, or would you elect to maintain the status quo? Please explain.	There must be waivers from the current constraints.	54.5%
	Must remove the federal government.	27.3%
	Focus on individual student growth.	27.3%
	Fund the mandate.	27.3%
	Involve educators in the discussion.	27.3%
	Changes must be made to the way special education is addressed.	18.2%
3. If you had the chance to make one statement to policymakers about policies passed that affect principals in the field who must implement them on a daily basis, what would you say?	Policymakers should confer with educators.	50.0%
	Principals concurred with the list from Round 1.	41.7%
	Policymakers must pass legislation based on research not politics.	33.3%
	Resources must be provided.	16.7%
	Societal issues must be addressed in order to meet mandate.	16.7%

and positively affect the lives of our nation's future leaders, students, through public education locally?

6. Are there any closing thoughts or questions you would like to share?

Based on perceptions reported by the panel experts in Round 1, and further supported in Round 2, principals felt policymakers should confer with principals prior to mandating new education policies or making changes to current policies. Given the struggle the researcher had encountered engaging principals in the field, panel experts were asked their perceptions on how meaningful discussions could be facilitated with policymakers. Panel experts did not report a clear plan of action for how to facilitate this communication. Almost half (45.5%) of the principals surveyed expressed that taking the initiative to facilitate this conversation was the responsibility of policymakers, while fewer (36.4%) suggested that principals must take this responsibility. Several members of the panel of experts (27.3%) concurred that the best way for both parties to work together would be through local and state associations.

Panel members were also asked how they felt they could best bring about change to national policies at a local level. Out of the 11 panelists who answered Question 5, 10 (90.1%) offered suggestions to bring about a change in national politics. Suggestions given by panelists included working through local and national organizations, communicating with legislators personally, being an education advocate (especially in support of obtaining what students need), and running for political office.

To bring the survey to a meaningful end, six (50%) of the 12 principals responded to the final item requesting them to convey any closing thoughts they would like to share.

Most of the expert panelists agreed that their jobs were challenging, but rewarding. Being a principal proved to be tough work, but the students were worth it. One shared that principals did their jobs with pride and did not focus on money. Another raised the concern about NCLB's creating greater separation between the *haves* and the *have-nots* in our nation. One described the disappointment that he and others like him felt about time spent in public education; a good number ended their careers in education prematurely, largely due to the shift to political agendas and unrealistic bureaucracy.

The purpose of engaging panelists in a second round discussion was to dig deeper into their perceptions of the themes established from Round 1 responses and to gain additional insights by adding three more questions to the final round. When asked to reflect upon the positive effects of NCLB, principals felt strongly that one positive aspect of the current mandate was data collecting, followed by the emphasis placed on individual student learning. Principals also agreed on negative aspects of the mandate; however, their reflections included a wide variety of criticisms. For example, NCLB mandates, as they related to special education students, increased unfavorable taxpayer attitudes toward public education. NCLB mandates were often perceived as unrealistic, focused on testing, and based on political agendas; they increased accountability while simultaneously reducing the funding and human resources needed to get the job done.

Upon completing the three questions, the experts were asked to reflect upon the list of changes suggested in Round 1. Panelists agreed on a number of items or efforts needed: offering waivers to the current constraints, removing the federal government's control from certain functions, focusing once again on individual student achievement,

funding the mandate, conferring with educators on matters of policy, and addressing special education challenges associated with the mandate. Principals agreed with the statements made by the group during Round 1 regarding comments to policymakers: policymakers need to confer with principals about public education policies; policies need to be based on research rather than politics; and resources need to be provided to see the mandate through to fruition. In addition, panelists stated they needed to address societal issues as a top priority before they could fully meet the demands of NCLB.

***Results from Round 2's additional questions.*** In addition to the Round 1 questions, panelists answered three more questions. For engaging policymakers, almost half of the panel (46%) expressed that policymakers should extend overtures to principals, while fewer members (36%) felt that it was up to principals to initiate the conversation. Panelists pointed out the importance of both parties' working through local and state organizations to facilitate this exchange. When asked what they could do personally to make a difference nationally that would influence their work locally, the panel suggested being active in local and national organizations/associations, serving as advocates for public education, engaging legislators, and running for public office. Panelists shared these closing thoughts on NCLB: felt demands of the job were tough, but every child was worth the time invested; expressed concern that NCLB was increasing the gap between haves and have-nots; feared that current mandate forced people to leave the profession due to political agendas and unrealistic mandates.

The perceptions expressed in Phase 1 were contributed by a small panel of principals across the nation considered experts in the field. A rich exchange of

information among these panel experts ensued; this type of discussion would not normally have been possible due to time, cost, and the geographic dispersion of the experts. The themes emerging from the views expressed and the subsequent level of agreement among panelists offered insight into the strengths and weaknesses of the current NCLB legislation. Phase 2 explored these insights further by administering the NCLB Perceptions Questionnaire to principals across the nation. The qualitative Phase 1 results from the modified Delphi component of the study would either be supported or refuted in the quantitative findings of Phase 2.

## **Results of Phase 2**

In October 2013, the invitation for Phase 2 was emailed to more than 300 principals representing all four geographic regions across the nation. Then, with the added encouragement of over 10 reminders in its wake, 98 participants had responded by the beginning of December 2013, for a preliminary response rate of 31.6% ( $n = 310$ ). Participants who chose to send a qualifying email upon completion of the questionnaire were entered into a drawing for a \$50 Amazon gift card (a total of five to be awarded) as compensation for their time and input. However, the number of participants ( $n = 12$ ) who completed the entire process—the Demographic Survey and the NCLB Perceptions Questionnaire—decreased from the beginning of the demographic questions to the end of the 75-item questionnaire.

**Results of Phase 2 Demographic Survey.** Although there were 98 Phase 2 respondents, responses to individual items did not always equal 98. Participants might have opted to skip given items; they might have simply overlooked a particular item. In



some cases, the item itself allowed for multiple entries (i.e., “Check all that apply”).

These variations affected totals shown in summary data and corresponding discussion.

Over 90 male and female principals from elementary, middle, and high schools responded to the Demographic Survey. Although all ethnic groups were represented, the majority of participants were white. Participants’ ages ranged from 35 to 72 (average age of 51). Participants reported a range of less than five years to over 30 years of experience as principals and the same range for years of experience in the classroom prior to becoming administrators. Participants reported having post-graduate degrees at the least (two with bachelor’s degrees and 13 with master’s degrees), but the majority had degrees beyond a master’s ranging from additional master’s degrees to the doctoral level. Participants reported serving a fairly consistent distribution of elementary, middle, and high schools, with slightly more being elementary school principals. The majority of participants worked in schools that ranged in size from under 500 to 1,500 students (average size 795); however, eight were principals at schools that housed over 1,500 students. The principals served in communities that almost equally represented rural and urban schools, with a greater number serving in suburban settings. Table 8 summarizes descriptive participant data derived from the Phase 2 Demographic Survey.

**Results of Phase 2 descriptive statistics.** When Phase 2 participants had completed the Demographic Survey, they were asked to complete the NCLB Perceptions Questionnaire. This 75-item questionnaire comprised statements regarding principals’ perceptions of the effects of NCLB based on the expert panel’s input from Phase 1. The purpose of the questionnaire was to see if a wider range of experts would support or

Table 8

*Phase 2 Demographic Survey Data*

Characteristic	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<i>Age (n = 97)</i>			
35-44	29	29.9%	29.9%
45-54	34	35.0%	64.9%
55-64	28	28.9%	93.8%
65-74	6	6.2%	100.0%
<i>Race/Ethnicity (n=95)</i>			
<i>(Check all that apply)</i>			
Black/African American	3	3.2%	-
White	86	90.5%	-
Hispanic/Latino	4	4.2%	-
Asian/Pacific Islander	2	2.1%	-
Native American/Alaskan Indian	1	1.1%	-
<i>Gender (n = 93)</i>			
Male	45	48.4%	48.4%
Female	48	51.6%	100.0%
<i>K-12 Ed. prior to... (n = 93)</i>			
0-5	8	8.6%	8.6%
6-10	34	36.6%	45.2%
11-15	22	23.7%	68.8%
16-20	12	12.9%	81.7%
21-25	10	10.8%	92.5%
26-30	2	2.2%	94.6%
30+	5	5.4%	100.0%
<i>Yrs. Exp. K-12 Admin. (n = 92)</i>			
0-5	11	12.0%	12.0%
6-10	19	20.7%	32.6%
11-15	37	40.2%	72.8%
16-20	12	13.0%	85.9%
21-25	8	8.7%	94.6%
26-30	3	3.3%	97.8%
30+	2	2.2%	100.0%

Table 8. Continued.

Characteristic	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<b>Highest Degree (<i>n</i> = 93)</b>			
BS	2	2.2%	2.2%
MS	13	14.0%	16.1%
MS+	39	41.9%	58.1%
EdS	11	11.8%	69.9%
PhD/EdD	28	30.1%	100.0%
<b>Geographic Setting (<i>n</i> = 92)</b>			
Rural	25	27.2%	27.2%
Urban	22	23.9%	51.1%
Suburban	45	48.9%	100.0%
<b>Age Group Served (<i>n</i> = 92)</b>			
Elementary	33	35.9%	35.9%
Middle	23	25.0%	60.9%
High	26	28.3%	89.1%
Other	10	10.9%	100.0%
<b>No. Students Served (<i>n</i> = 93)</b>			
1-500	36	38.7%	38.7%
501-1000	37	39.8%	78.5%
1001-1500	12	12.9%	91.4%
1501-2000	2	2.2%	93.6%
2001-2500	3	3.2%	96.8%
2501-3000	0	0%	98.8%
3001-3500	3	3.2%	100.0%
<b>Student Subgroups Rep. (<i>n</i> = 95) (Check all that apply)</b>			
Native American/Alaskan	41	43.2%	-
Native Asian Pacific Islander	41	43.2%	-
Black	81	85.3%	-
White	88	92.6%	-
Hispanic	72	75.8%	-
Economically Disadvantaged	84	88.4%	-
Limited English Proficiency	68	71.6%	-
Students with Disabilities	85	89.5%	-

refute the opinions stated by the panel of experts in Round 1. Table D1 (provided in Appendix D) displays each item on the questionnaire, the number of participants ( $n$ ) who answered the question, along with the mean and standard deviation (SD) of the responses. By indicating the distance of a given response from the mean, the standard deviation helped the researcher understand how much the answers varied on each item (i.e., the lower the standard deviation, the more the answers were alike; the higher the standard deviation, the more they varied on that particular item) (Information Technology Services [ITS], 2014).

After preliminary review and analysis of the responses, the researcher ranked the questions by means to gain a better understanding of the extent of agreement on a given statement among participants in relation to their responses to other items. Participant questionnaire responses are displayed in descending order of means in the Table D2 shown in Appendix D.

With the responses now ranked by means, comparisons could be made based on which items merited participant agreement most frequently and most intensely down to the items agreed upon the least. This analysis resulted in groupings of item numbers for which the means of the responses fell within each Likert-scale level's range, as demonstrated in Table 9.

The strongest agreement among participants pertained to eight items (10.7%) marked *strongly agree* and with a mean within the range of 4.5-5.0. These included two human interest types of items: (Item 62) "Educating children is vital to the success of the future of our country" and (Item 63) "Public education is challenging, but rewarding."

Table 9

*NCLB Perceptions Questionnaire Analysis of Items by Response*

Response	Value Range	Ratio	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent	Item Numbers
<i>Strongly Agree</i>	4.5-5.0	8/75	10.7%	10.7%	29, 37, 40, 41, 50, 60, 69, 73
<i>Agree</i>	3.5-4.4	51/75	68.0%	78.7%	1, 2, 7, 8, 9, 10, 14, 15, 16, 17, 19, 21, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 30, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 38, 39, 42, 43, 44, 46, 47, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 61, 62, 63, 64, 67, 70, 71, 72, 74, 75
<i>Neither Agree nor Disagree</i>	2.5-3.4	15/75	20.0%	98.7%	3, 4, 5, 6, 11, 13, 18, 20, 22, 31, 45, 48, 65, 66, 68
<i>Disagree</i>	2.0-2.4	1/75	1.3%	100.0%	12
<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	0.0-1.9	0	0	0	N/A

The participants who responded also brought out six items relating to these four suggestions to policymakers proposed by principals: (1) include educators in decisions, (2) formulate education legislation based on research, (3) provide funding for mandates, and (4) spend time in schools.

Participants responded most frequently by selecting *agree* to 51 items (68%) within the 3.5-4.4 range. These items covered a variety of topics: focus on students and achievement, curriculum, suggestions to policymakers, funding, administrators, principals, societal issues, and public perceptions. General statements were: NCLB had been both positive and negative; NCLB had brought about change; technology was a tool, not the answer; and the punitive impact of not making AYP had made the focus on punishment, not improvement. Statements regarding focus on students and achievement included: There was more to schools and students than tests; the focus of reform needed to be on individual student growth (calling for a change to the entire culture of teaching); legislation must take into account different circumstances of students (e.g., low socio-economic status [SES], individual education plans [IEP], inner city/urban settings); Special Education students must be tested on ability level not grade level; and although the 100% proficient requirement was often viewed as unrealistic, NCLB had caused educators to focus on data collection to foster formative assessment of practices and to identify those most effective in enhancing individual student growth as well as progress for subgroups of students.

Principals agreed that the federal government was taking a more active role in education; however, NCLB had increased the pressure on everyone from the building-

level principals to teachers and students, and principals were expected to do more with less funding and human resources. Policymakers had to take into account all aspects of the job and visit schools to gain a clearer understanding of what a mandate would mean in the field. NCLB was perceived as a blanket approach to fix education, an approach that was unrealistic. Finally, principals agreed that NCLB tended to increase the gap between the *haves* and *have-nots*, and principals would gladly take the time to respond to policymakers if given the chance. Principals felt that educators did their jobs with pride and were not focused on money.

Principal insights included “many career educators spend their lives trying to make a difference in the lives of children, and this mission is hindered by political agendas and unrealistic mandates.” Principals agreed that they needed to be the ones to seek out policymakers; educators would always step up to the plate; and principals could still be agents of change (e.g., NCLB had empowered some to celebrate staff, students, and continuous change), but must hone their leadership skills.

In addition, principals’ performance should not be based on state standardized assessments. Much of the job consisted of assisting students who were reacting to crises outside of school, but brought their experiences and emotions with them to school. NCLB had forced good people out of education. Principals shared the realization that they needed to engage policymakers through local associations and organizations, and also to use the legislation that was already in place while reflecting on the lessons learned from reform efforts over the last quarter century. Principals felt that, while NCLB had helped

inform the general public through reporting, it had also increased negative attitudes toward public education.

Principals agreed that many of the problems faced were societal issues, not education issues, which must be solved before public schools could be held accountable for student achievement. Furthermore, principals agreed that families expected schools to raise their children and yet were not pleased with the outcomes; this tended to create an impossible mission. Principals stated they could not engage policymakers effectively because the decisions of those policymakers were based on party agendas rather than real world facts. In this category, principals agreed upon curriculum effects of NCLB including: the increased accountability in reading/language arts and math; the increased time and emphasis on reading/language arts and math had decreased time, breadth, and depth of instruction in other areas; and the policy had shifted the focus of teaching from curriculum to test preparation. When it came to students and achievement, principals stated that test reporting needed to allow for a margin of error. Having to fulfill federal and state mandates was hurting the very people they were meant to protect—students, and the goals needed to be attainable (changed from 100% to 85-90%). Additionally, NCLB had shifted the focus to political agendas and not what was best for students based on research; it encouraged a move to standards-based grade cards.

The next category involved 15 items (10.7%) for which the mean of the responses indicated a more neutral stance on agreement (*neither agree nor disagree*) and fell within a 2.5-3.4 range. These responses included more general statements about education reform and further comments on topics mentioned previously. Principals were more



neutral about how NCLB had guided curricular change, mentioning that the Common Core Standards were the key to changing the national framework of education. Principals agreed less that NCLB allowed them to compare scores across the state, that the key to changing NCLB included Special Education mandates and how to address struggling learners, or that the increased focus on passing high school graduation tests was forcing low-achieving students to drop out earlier. Principals tended to be more neutral regarding statements to the effect that it was almost impossible for principals to find the time to make a difference in education policies, that legislators should visit high-achieving schools and see what was working there, and that the basic premise of equality in education had been a galvanizing paradigm shift. Principals tended to be more skeptical of statements including: principals did not make a difference at a national level, NCLB had placed them in a more direct leadership role, and NCLB had unified educators. In addition, principals did not agree that NCLB had improved staff development or unified educators. They were not of the same mind that high school graduation tests should be removed, that the policy had adversely affected high-achieving students academically speaking, or that it had caused schools to focus on recruiting high-achieving students.

For those who indicated *disagree* in responding to an item, that category consisted of only one item (in the 2.0-2.4 range) and one respondent (1.3%). This item stated that the NCLB had been the best thing to improve education in the last 30 years. Regarding the final Likert-scale level, no respondents selected *strongly disagree* to any items.

**Results of the factor analysis.** The descriptive analysis using the mean and standard deviation provided insight into participants' perceptions by comparing the items,

then grouping those that fell into the same Likert-scale range, and examining the similarities and differences. This comparison offered one option for managing a large amount of data, provided a statistical framework for the comparison, and allowed the researcher to synthesize the results into useful information.

Another method of data reduction employed was a factor analysis. A factor analysis allowed the researcher to statistically explore underlying variables that emerged as themes from the data collected in Phase 1 (IDRE, 2006). In the course of the analysis, Items 62 and 63 proved problematic in the loading; these items were dropped due to indications that their human interest nature might be compromising the data.

From asking participants about what effects NCLB had on their being agents of change in the field in Research Question 1, the themes identified were the positive and negative effects of NCLB. From asking participants about their recommendations for future reauthorizations of the policy in Research Question 2, themes identified included suggestions for change, thoughts for policymakers, engagement of policymakers, and closing thoughts.

The six themes that surfaced initially were regrouped into five underlying variables (each in support of either Research Question 1 or 2) identified by the factor analysis. These variables were (1) Positive Effects (supporting Research Question 1), (2) Negative Effects (supporting Research Question 1), (3) Recommendations [to policymakers] (supporting Research Question 2), Engaging [policymakers] (supporting Research Question 2), and Final Thoughts (supporting Research Question 2). These

variables, along with descriptive data (means and Cronbach alpha values in particular) and item numbers involved, are presented in Table 10.

Each variable was explored by considering the mean (the average of the participants' responses for the item in question) indicating strength of agreement and the Cronbach's alpha suggesting level of internal consistency. Positive Effects had a mean of 3.3401 (the weakest level of agreement of the five variables), but the highest Cronbach's alpha of all with a 0.889 (the strongest level of internal consistency detected). Negative Effects showed a mean of 3.8041 and a high Cronbach's alpha of 0.867, suggesting a fair amount of agreement among participants at a very consistent incidence of selection. Recommendations to policymakers had a mean of 4.0404 and a Cronbach's alpha of 0.845, together indicating strong agreement among participants and high internal consistency. Engaging policymakers had a mean of 3.8523 indicating moderate agreement and a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.617 suggesting somewhat lower internal

Table 10

*Results of Factor Analysis of Responses to the NCLB Perceptions Questionnaire*

Variable	<i>n</i>	Min.	Max.	Mean	SD	Cronbach's alpha	*Item Numbers
Positive Effects	82	1.27	4.50	3.3401	0.70419	0.889	1, 3-13
Negative Effects	82	2.00	5.00	3.8041	0.57371	0.867	2, 14-27
Recommendations	74	3.03	4.81	4.0404	0.36955	0.845	28-57
Engaging	74	2.78	4.89	3.8523	0.46176	0.617	58-68
Final Thoughts	71	2.71	5.00	4.1715	0.48637	0.679	69-75

\*Items 62 and 63 were dropped in the course of the analysis.

consistency in responses. Final Thoughts had a mean of 4.1715 indicating a fair amount of agreement, but at a low internal consistency rate with a low Cronbach's alpha of 0.679.

**Results of MANOVA testing.** The final testing of the themes explored in the factor analysis involved a series of multivariate analyses of variance (MANOVA) to determine if any significance could be detected between those themes and selected demographic variables of the participants. For each of the six demographic questions, a table of multivariate tests was reported showing four post hoc tests—Pillai's trace, Hotelling's trace, Wilks' lambda, and Roy's largest root—and the following results (IDRE, 2006):

1. Value—the test statistic for the given effect and the multivariate statistic in the prior column.
2. Approximate  $F$ —the approximate  $F$  statistic for the given effect and test statistic.
3. Hypothesis  $df$ —the number of degrees of freedom in the model.
4. Error  $df$ —the number of degrees of freedom associated with the model errors.
5. Significance of  $F$ —the  $p$ -value associated with the  $F$  statistic and the hypothesis and error degrees of freedom of a given effect and test statistic.

Considering the complicated nature of a MANOVA, even for mathematicians, the researcher has kept the explanation of the MANOVA test results very general (Carey, 1998). The four tests each generate a value of significance of  $F$  (i.e., the  $p$ -value). The  $p$ -value indicates whether there were statistically significant differences between participant responses based on demographic variables. A  $p$ -value of less than 0.05 indicates

statistical significance, while a  $p$ -value greater than or equal to 0.05 suggests no statistical significance based on the variable in question. The criterion of choice is the Wilks' lambda, which is an  $F$  statistic used to explain variance (J. A. Morrow, personal communication, March 13, 2014). The researcher will cite this value when determining significance for each test. The results of the data analysis related to the six demographic questions investigated follow.

**MANOVA 1.** The first MANOVA explored whether gender made a significant difference in the themes reported. As shown in Table 11, the one-way MANOVA resulted in no significant difference detected based on gender, with a Wilks' lambda = .845,  $F(24, 46.000) = 2.107, p > .05$ . These results proved interesting because there was almost an even split of male and female participants in Phase 2.

**MANOVA 2.** The second MANOVA conducted compared years of experience as a K-12 educator prior to becoming a principal. Participants were asked to select from the following categories of number of years of experience: (1) 0-5, (2) 6-10, (3) 11-15, (4) 16-20, (5) 21-25, (6) 26-30, and (7) 30+. The one-way MANOVA resulted in no significant difference detected based on years of experience prior to becoming a principal, with a Wilks' lambda = .581,  $F(24, 161.685) = 1.135, p > .05$ . The results of the four post hoc test results are presented in Table 12.

**MANOVA 3.** The third MANOVA considered whether years of experience as a K-12 principal significantly influenced the themes presented by the panel of experts. Phase 2 participants chose from the following ranges of years of experience: (1) 0-5, (2) 6-10, (3) 11-15, (4) 16-20, (5) 21-25, (6) 26-30, and (7) 30+. Years of experience

Table 11

*Results of Multivariate Test on Gender*

Effect	Value	<i>F</i>	Hypothesis <i>df</i>	Error <i>df</i>	Sig.
Pillai's trace	0.155	2.107	4.000	46.000	0.095
Wilks' lambda	0.845	2.107	4.000	46.000	0.095
Hotelling's trace	0.183	2.107	4.000	46.000	0.095
Roy's largest root	0.183	2.107	4.000	46.000	0.950

Table 12

*Results of Multivariate Test on Prior Experience as Educator*

Effect	Value	<i>F</i>	Hypothesis <i>df</i>	Error <i>df</i>	Sig.
Pillai's trace	0.492	1.144	24.000	196.000	0.299
Wilks' lambda	0.581	1.135	24.000	161.685	0.311
Hotelling's trace	0.604	1.119	24.000	178.000	0.327
Roy's largest root	0.295	2.407	6.000	49.000	0.041

principals had in the field did not significantly influence the themes as detected by the Wilks' lambda = .541,  $F(24, 161.685) = 1.296, p > .05$ , one of the four post hoc tests displayed in Table 13.

**MANOVA 4.** On level of educational attainment, participants chose from the following categories: (1) BS, (2) MS, (3) MS+, (4) EdS, and (5) PhD/EdD. MANOVA testing on educational attainment detected statistical significance based on the Wilks' lambda = .573,  $F(16, 141.170) = 1.766, p < .05$  shown in Table 14. Responses based on educational attainment varied significantly with only one of the dependent variables tested: perceptions of the positive effects of NCLB ( $p = .043$ ). These univariate results are shown in Table 15. Then, Tukey's (HSD) test was used to conduct paired comparisons of the positive effects of NCLB with participants who held a bachelor's and with participants who held a master's degree or higher. The subsequent Tukey's (HSD) test did not result in significant differences in participant responses on the negative effects of NCLB, recommendations to policymakers, or suggestions on how to engage policymakers.

**MANOVA 5.** The geographic setting that best described the school served was the variable investigated in the next MANOVA. Participants selected either (1) rural, (2) urban, or (3) suburban. The MANOVA yielded a significant effect on the Wilks' lambda = .573,  $F(16, 141.170) = 2.106, p < .05$  post hoc test arrayed in Table 16. Univariate testing on geographic setting varied significantly on two dependent variables: perceptions of the negative effects of NCLB ( $p = .039$ ) and recommendations to policymakers ( $p = .002$ ) as shown in the Table 17 results. However, when a Tukey (HSD) test was

Table 13

*Results of Multivariate Test on Years of Experience as Principal*

Effect	Value	<i>F</i>	Hypothesis <i>df</i>	Error <i>df</i>	Sig.
Pillai's trace	0.542	1.280	24.000	196.000	0.182
Wilks' lambda	0.541	1.296	24.000	161.685	0.174
Hotelling's trace	0.702	1.301	24.000	178.000	0.168
Roy's largest root	0.405	3.306	6.000	49.000	0.008

Table 14

*Results of Multivariate Test on Education Attainment*

Effect	Value	<i>F</i>	Hypothesis <i>df</i>	Error <i>df</i>	Sig.
Pillai's trace	0.440	1.151	16.000	196.000	0.098
Wilks' lambda	0.573	1.766	16.000	141.170	0.041
Hotelling's trace	0.725	2.015	16.000	178.000	0.014
Roy's largest root	0.694	8.498	4.000	49.000	0.000

Table 15

*Results of Univariate Tests on Education Attainment*

Dependent Variable		Sum of Squares	<i>df</i>	Mean Square	<i>F</i>	Sig.
Positive effects	Contrast	4.334	4	1.084	2.677	.043
	Error	19.835	49	.405		
Negative effects	Contrast	1.292	4	.323	1.053	.390
	Error	15.025	49	.307		
Recommendations to policymakers	Contrast	1.057	4	.264	2.376	.065
	Error	5.452	49	.111		
Engaging policymakers	Contrast	1.063	4	.266	1.467	.227
	Error	8.877	49	.181		



Table 16

*Results of Multivariate Test on Geographic Setting*

Effect	Value	<i>F</i>	Hypothesis <i>df</i>	Error <i>df</i>	Sig.
Pillai's trace	0.289	1.982	8.000	94.000	0.057
Wilks' lambda	0.714	2.106	8.000	92.000	0.043
Hotelling's Trace	0.395	2.224	8.000	90.000	0.033
Roy's largest root	0.384	4.514	4.000	47.000	0.004

Table 17

*Results of Univariate Tests on Geographic Setting*

Dependent Variable		Sum of Squares	<i>df</i>	Mean Square	<i>F</i>	Sig.
Positive effects	Contrast	.141	2	.071	.174	.840
	Error	19.835	49	.405		
Negative effects	Contrast	2.132	2	1.066	3.476	.039
	Error	15.025	49	.307		
Recommendations to policymakers	Contrast	1.540	2	.770	6.921	.002
	Error	5.452	49	.111		
Engaging policymakers	Contrast	.690	2	.345	1.904	.160
	Error	8.877	49	.181		

subsequently used to conduct paired comparisons of the dependent variable and geographic setting, it did not result in significant differences in participant responses comparing geographic setting and participant responses to the dependent variables of positive or negative effects of NCLB, recommendations to policymakers, or ways to engage policymakers.

**MANOVA 6.** The final MANOVA examined the age group of students that best represented the school where the given principal served: (1) elementary, (2) middle, or (3) high. The results from the MANOVA on age group of students served indicated no significant difference. Univariate testing on age group also failed to identify any significant effect of age group on any of the themes. Table 18 displays the results from the MANOVA.

**Summary of MANOVA testing.** There were six MANOVAs conducted to detect any significant differences in participant responses based on six demographic characteristics reported: (1) gender, (2) years of experience prior to principalship, (3) years of service as a principal, (4) education attainment, (5) geographic setting, and

Table 18

*Results of Multivariate Test on Age Group of Students*

Effect	Value	<i>F</i>	Hypothesis <i>df</i>	Error <i>df</i>	Sig.
Pillai's trace	0.193	0.825	12.000	144.000	0.624
Wilks' lambda	0.815	0.818	12.000	121.996	0.632
Hotelling's trace	0.218	0.810	12.000	134.000	0.640
Roy's largest root	0.160	1.918	4.000	48.000	0.123

(6) age group of students served. Two of these multivariate tests revealed significant differences on education attainment and geographic setting. Further, univariate testing suggested significant effect of two of the variables on three of the themes. Education attainment significantly influenced positive effects of NCLB. Geographic setting significantly influenced negative effects of NCLB and recommendations to policymakers.

**Phase 2 open-ended questions.** The 75 items in the NCLB Perceptions Questionnaire used in Phase 2 were divided into two sections, linking them with the respective research question they supported. At the end of each section, Phase 2 participants were asked to respond to an open-ended question. The two open-ended questions included: (1) What additional or concluding thoughts would you contribute to the effects of NCLB on you to be an agent of change in your building? and (2) What additional or concluding thoughts would you contribute to policymakers?

The resulting wealth of responses offered by principals were collected using PsychData, exported to a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet, grouped by response content, converted to Microsoft Word documents, and uploaded into QDA Miner 4. The responses were coded by themes, grouped by those themes (by code similarities), and exported to Excel spreadsheets in order to maintain specific statements by participants as they shared their closing thoughts.

What follows now are the researcher's summary of the themes explored in the answers provided by Phase 2 participants. This is important because the responses speak to the purpose of conducting the study to begin with—giving principals in the field the

opportunity to offer their insights on this policy and the recommendations they would offer to policymakers.

*Phase 2 open-ended Question 1.* The first open-ended question asked to Phase 2 participants requested additional or concluding thoughts to contribute to the effects of NCLB on them to be agents of change. The resulting 32 responses were initially coded into three themes observed which included positive effects, negative effects, and additional thoughts on the effects of NCLB. Each of these three themes will now be explored in more detail.

*Positive effects of NCLB.* Participants offered a variety of positive comments regarding the effect of NCLB on them to be agents of change that included a variety of themes: accountability, early education, individual student growth, standards, and remarks on education. The positive comment made the most (8/32; 25%) by principals in the field expressed their agreement with the accountability NCLB had brought about in a variety of ways. Principals agreed that increased accountability for individual student growth had made a difference in the quality of education that students from all subgroups received in public schools. Principals agreed that the increased accountability was needed. Principals recognized the importance of the job they performed and the difference it made to students; they took pride in doing it well and with passion. Principals wanted to identify the areas of strengths and weaknesses within their buildings, especially as a means to enable them to address the weaknesses. One principal summed this up by saying, “I am very much in favor of accountability, and the best education possible for every child, which is why I am in education.” As principals celebrated the

accountability piece, they also issued caution—caution about using accountability as a punitive measure, caution in connecting student growth to one individual teacher, caution in the expectation of 100% proficiency, caution in testing special education students based on grade level and not ability, and caution that the “devil is in the details” regarding the way accountability was addressed at the building level.

Another aspect of the policy some principals championed was the shift to focusing on standards, “looking deeply at vertical alignment of standards,” and how “we should be teaching to standards” (3/32; 9%). There were other individual comments made regarding the benefits of NCLB such as helping to eliminate teacher favorites, developing more qualified teachers, and having people throughout the country talking about education—that was a good thing. One final comment from one participant focused on the strong need for money to support early childhood education, a need that was more important than ever, and yet there was little to no money left to fund related initiatives. Specifically stated, “acknowledging that early education is a key component for later academic success has come far too late in the conversation.”

*Negative effects of NCLB.* Regarding principals’ perceptions of the effects of NCLB, the negative comments doubled the positive comments. The range of topics mentioned included the punitive aspects of NCLB, the shift in focus to the wrong agenda, achievement, lack of funding, and loss of local control; these were just some of the criticisms. The criticism that came up with the highest frequency (12/32; 38%) involved the achievement requirements associated with NCLB and how they had affected everyone at the local level, not just principals. Principals shared frustration that the 100%

proficiency expectation had not been changed, that there continued to be a lack of clarity regarding achievement, and that again there was a disservice to special education students in being tested on grade level. Principals reported that the increased pressure related to achievement had caused more stress for students, teachers, and the principals themselves. Principals pointed out stress felt from increased test anxiety and from animosity among teachers and parents; yet, there was no mention of parental responsibility and how it factored into student achievement. Principals noted that high-stakes testing had marginalized teaching to teaching to the test and had ultimately been detrimental to student achievement. One principal mentioned the focus on achievement had made, "...Pearson abundantly wealthy." One last comment from one participant alluded to the difference in the rigor with which standards were implemented between states; that difference often determined whether achievement was possible.

Two thoughts equally represented by principals' comments were the punitive aspects of the policy and the shift it had caused to the wrong agenda in public education (9/32; 28%). Principals shared that they were not motivated by threats, that the punitive aspects punished disadvantaged students and those working passionately to support them, and that schools were being penalized despite the fact that conditions in the schools were not equal. Principals stated that they felt the policy (created mainly for urban schools in big cities) was unfairly administered. One principal shared the opinion that responsibility for growth of a student should not be placed entirely on one teacher, and another questioned whether work was being done to meet a standard or in fear of punitive action. One principal stated, "Educators do not need to be punished for attempting to level the

playing field in a severely unlevel society.” The principal continued, “We deserve to be supported and encouraged for taking on a task that, if it were stated in political terms, outside of school, would have polarizing opinions particularly from our current discordant legislators.”

Principals criticized the policy for shifting the focus of public education to the wrong agenda, teaching to the test (taking away from time spent teaching and learning). Rather than spotlighting student and school growth, it emphasized status, making it more obvious that the policy was politically driven, not educationally focused. One principal added that s/he felt that educators brought the policy on themselves for having too many “throw-away students.” Two principals made strong points about the continued emphasis being placed on college readiness, despite the reality that many students were not college bound. The principals expressed concern about the shift away from offering a variety of other education tracks or programs to those students and the message that conveyed to students who were good at working with their hands and enjoyed it.

Other criticisms of the effects of NCLB came up such as the frustration that stemmed from the loss of local control. Three principals mentioned the lack of funding to meet the expectations of the policy and the disappointment felt by this shortfall. Finally, one principal stated that the fact that ESEA had failed to be reauthorized pointed to the discord at a national level.

*Additional thoughts on the effects of NCLB.* The final summary of thoughts principals shared at the close of the first section of the questionnaire covered specifics of common core standards, support for and criticisms of the researcher survey, and

principals' opinions on what public education needed. Some principals (4/32; 13%) specifically mentioned the attention placed on common core standards and regarded this as the "new political fight full of misconception" that had made the situation worse. However, in contrast one principal shared that maybe NCLB would have been more effective if the two initiatives were implemented at the same time.

Participants also shared criticisms and encouragement regarding their thoughts on the choice of topic and the survey. Principals shared that NCLB was not the focus anymore and asked if the researcher was referring to Race to the Top. One participant thought items 15-27 were biased and inappropriate. Another participant felt, "the survey covered the issues very well."

Finally, some principals (6/32; 19%) commented on what they felt public education needed. This list included being more in need than ever for strong leaders to hire strong teachers and to make the shift to standards and student performance that was truly needed to make school a professional learning center (PLC). A principal stated, "Educators want to do what is right for kids." Another principal stressed the need for the focus of reform to increase the capacity of classroom teachers to ensure all students were learning. Another principal mentioned, "We test too much and spend too much money in this process." A closing thought regarding the effect of NCLB on principals brought the focus back to the amount of time students spend at home compared with the amount spent in school. The principal stressed the need for school to be valued at home and expressed concern regarding what was being considered socially acceptable behavior and how that contributed to the issues faced in schools.



*Phase 2 open-ended Question 2.* The second open-ended question asked to Phase 2 participants requested additional or concluding thoughts to contribute to policymakers. The 22 responses were initially coded into two themes observed which included comments of skepticism and final thoughts to policymakers. Both of these themes will now be explored in more detail.

*Skepticism.* The first theme focused on principals' comments (10/22; 45%) regarding their skepticism of legislators and legislation. Principals expressed again, "One size doesn't fit all," when it comes to reform. Principals mentioned feeling skeptical of legislators' being open to what they had to say (noting personal experience with this); the principals would have to have the right people talking to legislators to get them to listen. Even the word reform was bothersome to one principal; the term implied that education was broken, but it was not broken. "If the definition of reform is reasonable increments of improvement by educators for students, then we're on the right path." Principals stressed the importance of policymakers understanding what the job entailed, seeing it from the principals' perspective, and walking a mile in their shoes. One principal stated, "Technocratic market-based reforms are tragically misguided," and continued, "An outcomes-based shift in thinking was necessary, but beyond that educators must drive the change." One principal shared the belief that, "the political system has made it impossible to effect the change that is needed in any area of reform." One other thought shared by a principal captured the lack of funding for the mandate and the belief that principals could accomplish their jobs if they had the funding necessary to provide for the needs of their students' families.

*Final thoughts to policymakers.* The final thoughts addressed to policymakers by participants included ideas about accountability, education associations, continuous improvement, and a host of closing comments synthesized into overall thoughts. Two principals (2/22; 9%) commented on accountability and beyond, coming back to the idea that accountability was not a bad thing; it had brought about notable change in the achievement of special education students. However, special education students still experienced a gap in achievement as compared to that of general education students. The goal of 100% proficiency needed to be changed to a measurement of student growth. Pushing “college readiness” was held to be unrealistic; it was the main contributing factor to the dropout rate. A better approach involved helping individual students develop skills they were good at and letting that guide their education toward a maximum experience.

Despite the long list of skepticisms enumerated earlier by principals, some principals (2/22; 9%) offered beliefs that associations were the key to making a difference at the national level. The principals made reference to both the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) and the State Collaborative on Reforming Education (SCORE) as two possible avenues for making a difference beyond the local capacity. One mentioned feeling that groups were more powerful when dealing with legislators.

Other principals (2/22; 9%) talked about legislators seeking out schools showing continuous improvement. The logic shared was that these schools were the ones to find to see what was working, especially when their practices succeeded with students living in

poverty. However, one principal felt that those were high-achieving schools because of the student population they served. These counter viewpoints were noted.

Finally, additional thoughts shared by principals were addressed; some of these thoughts were diametrically opposed. For example, one considered the researcher biased in the questions posed; another commented that the survey was well done. One principal stated, “We are out here getting it done,” while another suggested school personnel needed to be able to do their jobs. One principal revisited the need to offer students a trade school alternative if college was not an appropriate path for them. Another principal discussed the belief that teacher unions were too strong; they hindered the principal’s effectiveness in placing the best teachers in the classroom. For example, funded through donations from the union, the National Education Association (NEA) sent a liberal lawyer to a given school and recommended the hiring of teacher applicants who were democrats. This principal felt control should be given back to local communities to solve this type of issues.

Among the comments offered on the open-ended questions in the NCLB Perceptions Questionnaire, reactions from two participants (identified as Respondent A and Respondent B) were in direct conflict with each other in regard to Item 42 on the questionnaire worded as follows:

Item 42. I believe the problems we face are social problems, not education problems (i.e., poverty, drug addiction, broken families, mental health problems, and health problems in general). Only after these problems are solved can public schools be held accountable for achievement.

Respondent A's reaction to Item 42 and related comments from Respondent B are presented below. These passionate, yet opposing viewpoints served well in concluding this summary of the comments shared.

*Respondent A*—Seriously? While it is true that solving these problems is important, they will never go away, and we need to find ways to help individual students out of the situation.

*Respondent B*—Education is being asked to solve social problems. Instead, address poverty, social justice, health access, substance abuse, child care, and similar issues that will get kids in school ready and able to learn. Student and school success are measured by standardized tests never meant for this use. Statistics are being manipulated to support political agendas and the move of public funds into private hands—just look at the testing industry! Schools now exist for the data rather than the reverse. Students are not products on a shelf—business models are not conducive to quality education. The teaching profession is completely dishonored by the top down policies built upon blatant distrust of the people actually doing the work. Educators know and agree that there is need for improvement—in what field is there not? ...The education system is being destroyed from within by inept, politically-motivated non-educators who are driving us from the real work.

### **Discussion of the Findings**

In summary, the data collection process consisted of several key components that contributed to the overall findings: participant demographic information, findings from

Phase 1 and Phase 2, and principals' sensemaking perceptions of NCLB and recommendations for future changes to the policy. The data analysis techniques and software utilized for each of these key components have been described. This section examines how these components work together to support the findings as a whole.

Participants were drawn from two databases consisting of elementary, middle, and high school principals who had been honored for their contributions to the field. There were similarities among the participants who chose to take part in each of the phases. The average age of participants in this study was 50-51 years of age. Although the average age of participants in both phases was the same, there were differences in the racial, ethnic, and gender make-up of the groups. Phase 1 participants were all white males; Phase 2 participants were predominately white, but there was almost an even number of males and females represented. Participants in both Phase 1 and Phase 2 mainly ranged 6-20 in years' experience in the field prior to becoming principals. However, participants' years of experience as principals varied between Phase 1 and Phase 2 with Phase 1 ranging from 6-30 years and Phase 2 ranging from 0-30+ years. Most principals held at least a master's degree. Many had earned a higher degree than a master's; approximately 25% of participants in the study reported having an EdD or PhD. Participants represented each of the nation's geographic areas; more reported being from suburban areas in Phase 2, and urban regions were not represented at all in Phase 1. Phase 1 consisted of more high school principals, while Phase 2 consisted of more elementary principals. The size of the student populations represented varied, but the average school size in both phases

was approximately 800 students. Principals in both phases reported serving students from all subgroups.

In Phase 1 Round 1, panel experts expressed that NCLB had many positive effects such as bringing about change, increasing emphasis placed on data, and heightening focus on accountability. Experts identified these perceived negative aspects of the policy: being a one-dimension measure, levying unattainable criteria, and increasing pressure felt by principals, teachers, and students. Panel experts recommended waivers from the current constraints, focus on student growth, and relief from unattainable goals. Experts felt policymakers needed to confer with educators, to keep in mind all components of the job, and to pass legislation based on research not politics.

When asked to further comment on Round 1 responses, participants strengthened their consensus in Round 2. Experts agreed NCLB had brought about positive change in increased data collection, emphasis placed on individual student results, and guided curricular change. The list of negative aspects of the policy included the effects on how needs of special education students were addressed, creation of more unfavorable public attitudes, unrealistic expectations, too much focus on testing and political agendas, and increased accountability with decreased human resources and funding. Panel experts recommended policymakers create waivers to the current constraints, remove the federal government involvement with local issues, focus on individual student growth, fund the mandate, involve educators in the discussions, and make changes in the way special education was addressed. Finally, experts suggested that policymakers confer with

educators; pass legislation based on research, not politics; provide needed resources, and address societal issues in order to meet the mandate.

Panel experts' input from Rounds 1 and 2 of Phase 1 were then analyzed and compiled into the 75-item NCLB Perceptions Questionnaire that was disseminated to a wider group of principals dispersed across the nation to see if the sentiments were supported or refuted. A descriptive statistical analysis was conducted, and then items were ranked from the highest to the lowest mean. Results of the descriptive statistical analysis indicated that participants chose either *strongly agreed* or *agreed* to 59 of 75 (78.7%) of the items. Participants did not select either *agree* or *disagree* on 8 (10.7%) of the items and *disagree* on 8 (10.7%).

The next inquiry naturally sought to determine what items Phase 2 principals agreed and disagreed on compared to Phase 1 experts. Principals agreed on recommendations and suggestions to policymakers including conferring with principals, providing needed funding, visiting schools and seeing what schools were really like, and changing the proficiency requirements. Principals agreed on the need to focus on individual student growth; the increased pressure on principals, teachers, and students; a range of challenges experienced by principals; and the need to take into account the challenges students experience that play a part in their school performance. The focus on data and accountability was a positive, but using the results in a punitive light was considered detrimental to fostering educational growth.

Principals did not agree that NCLB had been the best thing to improve education in the last 30 years, that the policy has unified educators, or that the policy had caused

schools to focus on recruiting high achieving students. Principals did not agree that they did not make a difference at a national level, that Common Core was the key to changing education, or that NCLB had necessarily placed them in a more direct leadership role. Results of the descriptive analysis showed that principals agreed to approximately 80% of the sentiments expressed by the Phase 1 panel of experts.

The descriptive analysis provided data that could be grouped and explored based on agreement or disagreement. In addition to the descriptive analysis, a factor analysis was conducted to reduce the number of items being compared based on identification of underlying variables. The underlying variables included the positive effects, negative effects, recommendations for policymakers, engaging policymakers, and final thoughts. The highest level of consistency in participant responses was determined to be in participants' responses to positive effects, the negative effects (related to Research Question 1), and recommendations for policymakers (related to Research Question 2). Participant responses were inconsistent when suggesting ways to engage policymakers and expressing final thoughts.

A final statistical analysis was conducted to explore any significance that might be detected based on participants' demographic information reported. MANOVAs were conducted looking at the dependent variables of positive and negative effects, recommendations to policy makers, and ways to engage policymakers. Comparisons were made to see if participant responses varied based on the different independent demographic variables reported. MANOVAs were conducted exploring gender, years of experience prior to principalship, years of service as a principal, education attainment,



geographic setting, and age group served. Out of the six MANOVAs conducted, four demographic variables—years of experience prior to principalship, years of service as a principal, educational attainment, and geographic setting—proved statistically significant. In additional univariate testing, educational attainment showed significant effect on the theme—positive effects of NCLB; geographic setting showed significant effect on two themes—negative effects of NCLB and recommendations to policymakers.

The last component of data collection analysis consisted of the two open-ended questions asked as part of the Phase 2 questionnaire. This was an attempt to collect any concluding thoughts from participants on the two research questions, and this brought Phase 2 participants back to the initial questions posed by the study and the qualitative focus of the design. When asked about the effects of NCLB on their ability to be agents of change at the local/building level, principals shared positives of the policy such as accountability, early education, individual student growth, standards, and the increased focus on education. Principals expressed negative aspects of the policy (e.g., the punitive aspects, the shift in the education to the wrong agenda, problems with achievement, lack of funding, and loss of local control). Principals commented on the need for strong educational leaders, both agreement and disagreement regarding Common Core, the need for school to be valued at home, and the challenges presented by changing perceptions of behaviors considered to be socially acceptable.

Phase 2 participants were asked to comment further on their recommendations or closing thoughts to policymakers. Almost half of the participants who answered the question pointed out their skepticism toward legislators and legislation. Principals felt

that legislators were interested in party agendas, not in hearing from principals in the field about what would actually make a difference in the lives of students. Principals expressed the need for funding and the need to change the expectation of proficiency, including how special education students were tested. Despite their skepticism and criticisms, principals shared their belief that there were ways to make a difference in national policies through organizations and associations, with groups viewed as more powerful than individuals when dealing with legislators. Some principals talked about looking at schools showing continuous improvement to see what was working. Another strong argument presented by principals dealt with the shift in focus to only college readiness, how this approach alienated students who were more trade-minded, and how those practical skills were not only needed, they should be celebrated.

One closing thought about the plight of public education brought this debate back to where the study started with President Johnson's intent to provide government funding in areas where schools serving students of greater need would receive more funding to help those students. Participants in Phase 2 expressed passion on both sides of this debate. One participant openly mocked a previous statement suggesting that societal wrongs that plagued students would never be made right and that the only way to help would be to assist students in getting out of harmful situations. Another participant embraced the concept stating that, until the societal imbalances were addressed, public schools could not be held accountable for achievement or achievement gaps when students came from an uneven playing field. The researcher believed the most important players in this conversation to be the principals in the field across the nation who were

passionately working to close the gaps, to address societal challenges, and to articulate the need to have their opinions voiced (even though they often genuinely struggled to have the time or the open forum to do so).

#### **Summary of Chapter 4**

The results of the data collection for both Phase 1 and Phase 2 were presented in Chapter 4. The purpose of this modified Delphi study was to explore the effects of NCLB on principals and to have these principals, experts in the field, share their recommendations for future changes to the policy. The results of the data analysis were organized with the individual components explored initially and then a look at the components as they contributed to the study as a whole. Data analysis results from both Round 1 and Round 2 of Phase 1 provided the baseline of insight to build the NCLB Perceptions Questionnaire administered to a larger group of participants in Phase 2. The quantitative data analysis supported the baseline offered by the panel of experts from Phase 1. The final analysis conducted was a qualitative analysis of the open-ended questions asked as part of the questionnaire. When given the opportunity to offer their insights on the policy and recommendations to policymakers, principals expressed both positive and negative effects of the policy and recommendations for future changes. Their responses for both Phase 1 and Phase 2 have been analyzed; this provided a glimpse into how principals have made sense of the policy and how they have been willing to share their insights when asked.

The findings, implications, and suggestions for future studies are discussed in Chapter 5. The discussion includes a summary of the study—the theoretical framework

used to guide the study, the study's purpose, and the investigators' conclusions and comments; the impact of the study in terms of what was learned (e.g., the strengths, weaknesses, and limitations of the study). Finally, the implications of the study and recommendations for future studies are examined.

## Chapter 5

### Conclusions, Implications, and Recommendations

Chapter 5 is divided into multiple sections. The first section revisits topics explored in the literature review and conclusions based on participant input from Phase 1 and Phase 2. The next section presents the researcher's conclusions derived from the data analysis and personal experience. Finally, the researcher's thoughts regarding implications of the study and recommendations for future work are discussed.

#### Study Topics

The modified Delphi study provided a forum for principals in the field to address the effects of NCLB and to share their recommendations for future changes to the policy. A number of key topics were explored in the review of literature review; they were later revisited through principals' perceptions shared during the data collection efforts in Phase 1 and Phase 2. Key topics included:

1. The societal inequities that haunt the public education system and challenge educators to make the gains demanded by education policies like NCLB, without offering financial support to help students who do not come to school with what they need to be successful. Although "...The call for principals to accomplish great things with little support, and to be all things to all people, is certainly not [new]. What is new is the degree to which schools are expected to resolve society's social and educational inequities in a market-based environment" (Katka, 2009, p. 328).

2. The benefits the accountability piece of NCLB has brought to education that was needed and has brought about change in how educators address individual student groups. Paige described the goal, "...is to see every child in America—regardless of ethnicity, income, or background—achieve high standards" (Jorgensen & Hoffman, p. 6). Principals celebrated the noted improvements in assessing students, especially by subgroups, and the difference this has made in the growth seen by these subgroups.
3. The intention was to use the data collected as a tool to support areas of strengths and needs in our schools and with our students, and the punitive aspect of NCLB has increased negative public opinions and demoralized educators. In turn this has increased pressure on principals, teachers, and students. This pressure has also caused an increased amount of time spent to be spent on subjects that were tested and a decreased amount of time spent on non-tested subjects, classrooms, and student activities (Davis, 2011). In addition, student growth should not be measured by a one-dimensional measurement, and the criteria originally proposed of 100% student proficiency must be changed.
4. Policymakers must confer with educators, keep all of the components of the job in mind, and must pass legislation based on research, not political agendas. Fowler (2009) explained that all educational leaders must be at the forefront of navigating the journey in an age of accountability.

These topics were explored in the literature review and reinvestigated in the perceptions' shared by the expert panel in Phase 1 and supported by participant's questionnaire input from Phase 2.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this modified Delphi study was to explore the effects of NCLB on principals in the field, to realize the positive and negative effects it has had on their ability to be agents of change at a local level, and to gather recommendations for reauthorization of the policy. A forum for the discussion of this phenomenon that might not otherwise have been possible due to logistics, cost, and time was provided through a modified Delphi technique. A wealth of participants' perceptions, what Cortes (2011) referred to as *metis*, was collected, analyzed, and interpreted based on the shared experience of this phenomenon. Previous studies conducted and reviewed in this study revealed research studies that had been done at the high school or elementary school level, or at specific levels in a certain state and or district (Davis, 2011; Fuller, 2004; McCullers, 2009; Pfeiffer, 2006; and Watson, 2007). The present study, however, is the first to implement a modified Delphi technique seeking input from principals nationwide representing both elementary and secondary (middle and high) levels of our public education system.

### **Researcher's Conclusions and Comments**

From the researcher's overall assessment of the data collected and analyses conducted in the course of this study, these additional conclusions and comments are offered to supplement or reinforce the findings discussed and to provide a broader

perspective on the implications of this study. There are no easy answers to the struggles that plague the current plight of public education in the United States. Hargreaves and Fink (2006) stated, “Change in education is easy to propose, hard to implement, and extraordinarily difficult to sustain,” adding “Sustainable improvement depends on successful leadership” (p. 1). Through the lens of sensemaking theory, the researcher offered a forum for principals in the field to voice their opinions about NCLB and their recommendations for changes to the policy. Principals who participated in this study shared insights into how they had made sense of this policy and the implications it had held for them on a day-to-day basis. The success and sustainability of that success rests on the shoulders of principals leading this charge at the building level. In order to bring about sustainable improvement, principals must have a firm grasp on the challenges created in the field by the different forces at play in the world of educational reform. Principals must be strong enough to stand together and speak out against the distrust and disenfranchised way schools are frequently portrayed in the media, and they must network and build coalitions (Fowler 2009).

This study represents one attempt to offer a forum for educators to share their experiences and to gather strength from their combined expertise. When given this opportunity, principals brought forward a wealth of insight into their thoughts and experiences. A summary of the conclusions guided by the two, overarching research questions posed will now be addressed.

**Research Question #1. What effects has the current NCLB legislation had on you and our ability to be an agent of change in your school?** In response to this



question, principals reported the effects to be mixed (both positive and negative). Those who participated in Phase 1 stated positive effects of NCLB included: increased data collection, increased emphasis placed on individual student results, and curricular changes that have been set in motion and guided by the legislation. When Phase 2 participants were asked their opinions regarding the positive effects of NCLB, participants strongly agreed or agreed with 13 (93%) of the 14 statements, except item 12: NCLB has been the greatest thing to improve education in the last 30 years. Previous studies cited by Watson (2007) and Scandrett (2010) noted similar positive effects of NCLB for principals. Watson (2007) included accountability and instructional leadership as positive, while Scandrett (2010) explained one finding by noting, “Principals have moved from managing the school setting to becoming instructional leaders in their schools. They focus now more on data and delivery of instruction as they implement NCLB” (p. 137).

Principals from Phase 1 reported negative aspects of the legislation included: effects on how special education students were addressed; creation of more unfavorable public attitudes; perceptions of its being unrealistic, focused on testing, and based on political agendas; and increased accountability accompanied by diminished funds and human resources. Phase 2 participants strongly agreed or agreed on 10 (77%) of the 13 negative statements, while rating the other three statements as neither agree nor disagree. These negative aspects were echoed by Davis (2011) stating that, although high-stakes testing associated with NCLB raised academic expectations, the negative effects of losing

instructional time, narrowing the curriculum, and enduring inaccurate reporting by the media were also noteworthy.

**Research Question 2. What recommendations for change to the law would you suggest in the next iteration of the legislation?** This question actually comprised two parts in that principals were asked for their recommendations for changes to the policy and for any closing thoughts they would want to share with policymakers. Phase 1 participants cited recommendations that included: focus should be shifted to individual student growth; educators must be involved in the discussion; goals must be attainable; we should move to standards-based grading, provide professional development to make reform consistent, account for low SES students and students with IEPs; special education students should be tested based on ability level; and policymakers must fund the policies they mandate. Phase 2 participants strongly agreed or agreed on all 12 recommendations suggested by Phase 1 participants. McCullers (2009) noted similar recommendations, summarizing the need to eliminate “statistically extraordinary goal of 100% proficiency, by the year 2014, and move toward a growth model” (p. 113).

Regarding thoughts they would share with policymakers if given the opportunity, Phase 1 participants stated policymakers needed to spend time learning and understanding the challenges in public education; to confer with educators more; to pass mandates based on research, not political agendas; and to address societal issues more effectively. Phase 2 participants agreed with all 13 of the statements presented regarding thoughts for policymakers. Fuller (2004) expressed the need for policymakers to get involved, but that the “involvement must go beyond surveys and focus groups...”

“...policymakers must have observations of, interviews and conversations with these professional in order to get a true sense of what is behind the numbers that are used to categorize these schools” (p. 145).

Out of all the feedback gathered and analyzed, the researcher noted principals felt strongly about the need for policymakers to confer with principals regarding education policies. The researcher was compelled to gather additional feedback from principals regarding their thoughts on how to engage both parties. Almost half of the principals reported that policymakers must take the time to engage principals, visit schools, and work through local representatives. A little less than half of the principals suggested educators must make the first move by reaching out to policymakers through local and state organizations. Although Phase 2 participants agreed with the statements regarding engaging policymakers, neither group of principals offered a clear answer to the dilemma. However, principals did strongly stress their willingness to talk, but remained somewhat skeptical of an appreciable outcome because the information imparted tended to fall on deaf ears all too often.

The purpose of this study was to offer principals in the field an opportunity to share their insights regarding NCLB on their ability to be agents of change at the building level and capture their recommendations for future iterations of the law. The purpose was realized through the participation of over 100 principals across the nation, and the researcher's perseverance in collecting and analyzing their responses. The researcher passionately believes these insights are the key to bringing about positive educational reform in public schools across the United States.

## **Strengths of the Study**

This study produced a forum for principals in the field to offer feedback from their experiences that could influence policymakers, current educational leaders, and organizational reform through the voice provided by principals on their insight and recommendations. This was made possible because of the strengths that can be attributed to this study as follows:

1. The research design involved implementing a modified Delphi study to be conducted nationwide to solicit opinions from principals serving at the elementary, middle, and high school levels.
2. The study was facilitated by implementation of an electronic data collection process through the use of an online website, PsychData. This online service assisted in the design of the study, presented the study to participants, and provided technical support in the beginning stages of the data analysis.
3. Responses from the Phase 1 panel of experts resulted in a wealth of information used to establish the baseline of the study and to support development of the NCLB Perceptions Questionnaire implemented for data collection in Phase 2.
4. In keeping with evidence-based decision making, the study was strengthened by the data-driven nature of the approach taken (e.g., use of descriptive statistical analysis of the responses to the questionnaire which supported the majority of items presented, use of factor analysis and data reduction processes to identify underlying variables).

### **Weaknesses of the Study**

The researcher looked for identifying aspects that could be negatively attributed to the study. In the researcher's opinion the following are possible weaknesses of the study:

1. The large amount of qualitative data collected in Phase 1 was coded by the researcher as opposed to being coded by an independent reviewer.
2. The Likert-type scale used in the NCLB Perceptions Questionnaire was based on a 5-point interval offering participants the option of "*neither agree nor disagree*" rather than its being based on a stronger, forced option imposed by a 4-point scale.
3. There were no provisions made to determine the impact that attribution might have had to the results of Phase 1 and Phase 2.

### **Limitations of the Study**

In addition to the strengths and weaknesses noted, the limitations of the study must also be considered. Interpretation of the results of this study involved the following limitations:

1. An instrument was not developed as a result of this study regarding principals' perceptions of an educational policy. Therefore, criterion validity was not established because the questionnaire was not tested in conjunction with an instrument that had been validated previously.
2. This study relied on self-reported data. Thus, the study was limited by participant perceptions and the honesty of their responses.

3. The study was limited to the opinions of selected academic experts recognized by the same education associations.
4. The researcher collected data solely based on electronic interactions; therefore, the study was limited to data entered and processed electronically.

### **Implications for Policymakers**

Given the described lack of communication between policymakers and principals in the field, this study, including the themes addressed and synthesis of information collected, should serve as feedback and a conversation starter with policymakers. Policymakers should gain insight into the wide reaching effects of educational policy implemented at the local level. Policymakers should explore sensemaking at the ground level, because how principals at the local level understand and implement educational policies determine the effectiveness of those policies (Gonzalez, 2008; Spillane, 2004). There needs to be more qualitative explorations into the effects of such policy (Fuller, 2004). Policymakers should take into account the power they have to make a difference in our nation's education system. They can take steps to ameliorate the painful side effects that impact those in the field due to well-intended policy that bring with it unexplored implications and poorly funded mandates. "Until politicians, lobbyists, and the testing industry put aside personal gain, engaging and relevant education for students will be shortchanged" (West, 2010, p. 145).

### **Implications for Leadership**

This study has provided insight that can inform current educational leaders (superintendents and administrators) on ways to use introspection while navigating

federal mandates and acting as agents of change in the field. Principals form their beliefs about their world and the decisions they make in it through reflection and retrospection (Gonzalez, 2008). Having principals reflect upon the positive and negative effects of NCLB on their abilities to be agents of change has offered key insight to how they made sense of the policy. At the same time, the information provided in this study should influence leadership preparation programs by providing insight into the dilemmas principals face as agents of change in the wake of federal policies. Additional NCLB implications addressed by Enfield (2008) included: district incentives must be district-driven and building owned; district leaders must be able to convey such policies effectively, and all stakeholders must be involved in the redistribution of resources.

### **Implications for Organizations**

This study explored current principals' perceptions in the field regarding the effects of NCLB and recommendations for change. This insight should offer support, guidance, and direction when addressing the effects of educational policy at a local level and how to be change agents trusted to lead the charge. In addition, principals should gain awareness of ways they can help influence educational policy at the national level. At the same time, the importance of building relationships is the key to bringing about change at the local level and at the national level (Crew 2011). Principals must work together with their staff, but also with each other for their voices to be heard. There is a need for a voice to be given and experiences shared among those leading the mandates and accountability efforts (Fuller, 2004).

## **Implications for Future Research**

“Results from any one Delphi study should be viewed as a beginning statement and not as a definitive work” (Jenkins & Smith, 1994, p. 428). Therefore, using this study as a guide, future research efforts should be done to support or refute the findings gathered in this study. Future research efforts should include the following:

1. Include a greater variety of stakeholders and their perceptions and suggestions for bringing about change in their respective schools.
2. Replicate Phase 1 of the study with a different panel of experts (or even more recent honorees from the associations selected for this study) to determine if effects and recommendations expressed are supported or refuted.
3. Replicate the study incorporating a different educational policy, and determine principals’ perceptions of the policy.
4. Replicate the study and explore the perceptions of stakeholders other than principals on NCLB or on a different educational policy.
5. Replicate the study design to explore other topics in order to develop an instrument used to explore participant perceptions of the effects of an educational policy in general.
6. Conduct focus group discussions based on the finding from this study with principals attending conferences to gain further insight on principals’ perceptions on the effects and recommendations for NCLB and other educational policy topics.



## **Unanticipated Problems in Conducting This Study**

Considering this study was the researcher's first attempt to conduct research of this scope, breadth, and depth, a number of unforeseen problems arose. The following are problems that would be addressed differently if the researcher conducted a similar study in the future:

1. The researcher experienced difficulty in getting principals to participate.
2. In hindsight, the researcher would revisit the theoretical framework and the depth to which it was incorporated into the study, possibly using the seven characteristics of sensemaking theory (Weick, 1995) to inform the questions asked about participants' perceptions.
3. In hindsight, the researcher would have offered more money initially during Phase 1 and offered more gift cards in Phase 2, not because of an unlimited financial ability, but the researcher felt that the perceptions of participants who did choose to take part in the study were well worth the cost.
4. The researcher experienced challenges in establishing the foundation of the literature review. Now having completed the study, the organization of the review, the studies reviewed, and the reporting of those studies would have been addressed differently.

## **Academic and Professional Practices**

More studies need to be conducted in the area of public education policy. The effort to capture more empirical evidence of the effects of the policy on principals in the field and ways to bring about positive widespread change to the field is imperative.

Principals need to lead the change, not be led by the policies. This implies the Law of Sensitive Dependence Upon Initial Conditions. “Science has shown the butterfly effect to engage with the first movement of any form of matter—including people” (Andrews, 2011, p. 9). Based on the research collected in this study, therefore, principals will offer insights and should be engaged in the first movement of educational reform.

### **Summary of Chapter 5**

Chapter 5 provided a summary of the study and its findings. It addressed the purpose and focus of the study and presented conclusions based on the researcher’s data analysis and experience in the field. In addition, what was learned from the study brought to light its strengths and weaknesses and provided insight into its implications. Finally, the researcher offered suggestions for future research in the field.

Chapter 5 is followed by the list of references and appendices containing documents used in the Phase 1 and Phase 2 data collection. The researcher’s vita is the final document of this dissertation.

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## **Appendices**

## **Appendix A: Phase 1 Round 1 Documents**

Invitation/Consent

Demographic Survey

Open-ended Questions

PREVIEW MODE: Responses will NOT be stored.

## The Effects of NCLB and Recommendations for Change: A Modified Delphi Study of Principals' Perceptions

**Invitation** – You are being invited to participate in this study as an expert in the field of educational leadership. Unfortunately, those who serve the public in education are at the mercy of those policies implemented at a national level. However, the very people enlisted to oversee the implementation of those policies are sparsely represented when the policies are being created. The purpose of this study is to create a forum for experts in the field to discuss the effects of NCLB and offer suggestions for future reauthorizations. The researcher wants to provide a forum for the discussion of this phenomenon that might not otherwise be possible due to logistics, cost, and time. This modified Delphi study will be conducted in two phases.

**Phase 1** – You are being asked to participate in phase one. If you choose to continue, you will be asked to answer 10 short demographic questions, and then complete three open-ended questions about your thoughts on NCLB and future reauthorizations of the law. The answers from these three questions will be compiled, and a second round of questions/statements will be sent back to you for further clarification and consensus. Once you have submitted your feedback to the second round, you will be guided through the process to obtain your \$25 Amazon gift card. A high return rate is necessary in order to make the study valid; your expertise and willingness to participate are invaluable to me.

**Phase 2** – A four-point leveled questionnaire will be developed from the first phase based on participant responses. The questionnaire will then be sent out to other honored principals to further solicit quantitative feedback.

**Participants** – A list of 449 possible participants was created, including participants' email addresses, from the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) and the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NAASSP) databases. The NAESP annually recognizes elementary and middle school principals for exceptional leadership in the field with the National Distinguished Principal Award. A list of the 2009 through 2011 National Distinguished Principals provided 185 recipients, which were obtained via the Internet, along with the recipients' email addresses. In addition to the NAESP the NAASSP also recognizes outstanding middle and high school principals in the field with the State Principal of the Year Award. A list of the NAASSP 2009 through 2011 State Principal's provided 264 recipients, which was obtained, along with the recipients' email addresses. These two lists were combined to create a total of 449 possible participants. Phase 1 consists of 60 possible participants selected from the 2011 principals honored across the nation to represent the fifty states and nine geographical regions. Phase 2 participants will be chosen from the list to participate if they were not asked to participate in phase 1.

**Consent** - Your participation is voluntary and can be withdrawn at anytime without penalty. This consent is agreed upon if you choose to participate. If you choose to withdraw, your survey input will be omitted and record of such destroyed. Confidentiality will be insured through identification of participants via email, and survey input/results will be kept in a locked cabinet in Dr. Brewer's office, who possesses the only key to the cabinet. Therefore, confidentiality of the study is insured and risks are minimal.

Thank you for your time and consideration. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Respectfully submitted,  
Melissa Blalock  
Ph.D. Candidate  
Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies  
University of Tennessee Knoxville  
[mhenry6@utk.edu](mailto:mhenry6@utk.edu)  
865-680-3141

Dr. Autumn Tooms Cyrès  
Student Advisor  
Professor and Director of the Leadership Center  
[atoms@utk.edu](mailto:atoms@utk.edu)  
865-974-4559

Dr. Ernest Brewer  
Department Review Committee Chair  
Professor and PI/Director of Federal Program  
[ewbrewer@utk.edu](mailto:ewbrewer@utk.edu)  
865-974-8924

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PREVIEW MODE: Responses will NOT be stored.

1) What is your age?

2) What is your race/ethnicity (check all that apply)?

- Black/African American
- White
- Hispanic/Latino
- Asian/Pacific Islander
- Native American/Alaskan Indian
- Other (please specify)

3) What is your gender?

- Male
- Female

4) How many years experience do you have as a K-12 educator prior to becoming a principal?

- 0-5
- 6-10
- 11-15
- 16-20
- 21-25
- 26-30
- 30+

5) How many years experience do you have working as a principal in a K-12 school?

- 0-5
- 6-10
- 11-15
- 16-20
- 21-25
- 26-30
- 30+

6) What is your highest level of educational attainment?

- BS
- MS
- MS+
- EDS
- Ph.D./Ed.D.

7) Which geographic setting BEST describes the school in which you serve?

- Rural
- Urban
- Suburban
- Other (please specify)

8) Which age group BEST describes the school in which you serve?

- Elementary
- Middle
- High
- Other (please specify)

9) Approximately what is the total number of students served by your school?

10) What subgroups of students are served by your school (check all that apply)?

- Native American/Alaskan
- Native Asian Pacific Islander
- Black
- White
- Hispanic
- Economically Disadvantaged
- Limited English Proficiency
- Students With Disabilities

Continue ONLY when finished. You will be unable to return or change your answers.

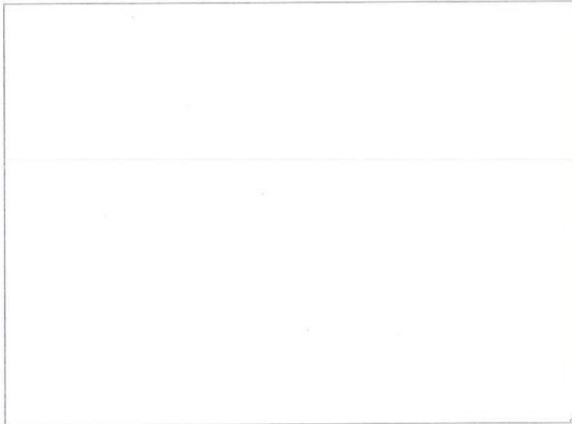
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**Phase 1/Round 1  
Open-Ended Questions**

- 11) How has NCLB affected your ability to be an agent of change in your school? Positively? Negatively? Please explain.



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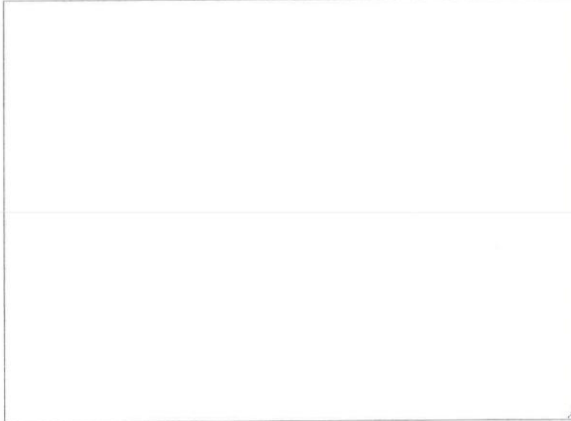
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12) If given the option, would you choose to make changes to the current NCLB legislation or would you elect to maintain the status quo? Please explain.



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PREVIEW MODE: Responses will NOT be stored.

- 13) If you had the chance to make one statement to policy makers about policies passed that affect principals in the field who must implement them on a daily basis, what would you say?



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## **Appendix B: Phase 1 Round 2 Documents**

Invitation/Consent

Review of Round 1 Responses

Additional Open-ended Questions

PREVIEW MODE: Responses will NOT be stored.

## The Effects of NCLB and Recommendations for Change: A Modified Delphi Study of Principals' Perceptions

**Doctoral Study Title** – The Effects of NCLB and Recommendations for Change: A Modified Delphi Study of Principals' Perceptions

**Invitation** – You are being asked to participate in this second round on phase 1 of this study as an expert in the field of educational leadership. Unfortunately, those who serve the public in education are at the mercy of those policies implemented at a national level. However, the very people enlisted to oversee the implementation of those policies are sparsely represented when the policies are being created. The purpose of this study is to create a forum for experts in the field to discuss the effects of NCLB and offer suggestions for future reauthorizations. The researcher wants to provide a forum for the discussion of this phenomenon that might not otherwise be possible due to logistics, cost, and time. This modified Delphi study will be conducted in two phases.

[Phase 1 – Thank you for your participation in phase one. The answers from the three questions asked in round 1 were compiled, and a second round of questions/statements are being sent back to you for further clarification and consensus. Once you have submitted your feedback to the second round, you will be guided through the process to obtain your \\$25 Amazon gift card. A high return rate is necessary in order to make the study valid; your expertise and willingness to participate are invaluable to me.](#)

**Phase 2** – A four-point leveled questionnaire will be developed from the first phase based on participant responses. The questionnaire will then be sent out to other honored principals to further solicit quantitative feedback.

**Participants** – A list of 449 possible participants was created, including participants' email addresses, from the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) and the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) databases. The NAESP annually recognizes elementary and middle school principals for exceptional leadership in the field with the National Distinguished Principal Award. A list of the 2009 through 2011 National Distinguished Principal's provided 185 recipients, which were obtained via the Internet, along with the recipients' email addresses. In addition to the NAESP the NASSP also recognizes outstanding middle and high school principals in the field with the State Principal of the Year Award. A list of the NASSP 2009 through 2011 State Principal's provided 264 recipients, which was obtained, along with the recipients' email addresses. These two lists were combined to create a total of 449 possible participants. Phase 1 consists of 60 possible participants selected from the 2011 principals honored across the nation to represent the fifty states and nine geographical regions. Phase 2 participants will be chosen from the list to participate if they were not asked to participate in phase 1.

**Consent** – Your participation is voluntary and can be withdrawn at anytime without penalty. This consent is agreed upon if you choose to participate. If you choose to withdraw, your survey input will be omitted and record of such destroyed. Confidentiality will be insured through identification of participants via email, and survey input/results will be kept in a locked cabinet in Dr. Brewer's office, who possesses the only key to the cabinet. Therefore, confidentiality of the study is insured and risks are minimal.

Thank you for your time and consideration. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Respectfully submitted,  
Melissa Blalock  
Ph.D. Candidate  
Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies  
University of Tennessee Knoxville  
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Department Review Committee Chair  
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865-974-8924

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PREVIEW MODE: Responses will NOT be stored.

Modified Delphi Study  
Phase 1/Round 2

1) How has NCLB affected your ability to be an agent of change in your school? Positively? Negatively? Please explain.

Positive Effects of NCLB -

Caused Change  
Increased Emphasis on Data  
Heightened Focus on Accountability  
Waiver has made a Difference  
Focus on Student Learning  
Focus on Subgroups  
Safe Harbor  
More Accountable

Negative Effects of NCLB

Single Dimensional measure  
Criteria not Attainable  
Increased Pressure  
Accountability Disproportionate  
Special Education Students tested on grade level not ability level  
Not enough resources  
Impact of Not Making AYP  
Focus is on Political Agendas  
Focus on Testing Items and Skills  
Shifted focus to students passing high school graduation tests

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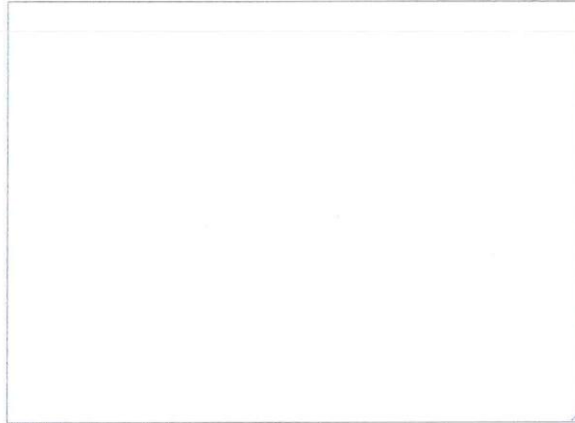
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2) If given the option, would you choose to make changes to the current NCLB legislation or would you elect to maintain the status quo? Please explain.

Waiver from constraints  
Focus on student growth  
Goals not attainable  
Having to fulfill federal and state mandates  
Special Education  
Educators leaving the field  
Political agendas becoming educational laws  
Money not being well spent  
Punitive is problematic  
Allow margin for error in test reporting provide professional development to make shift



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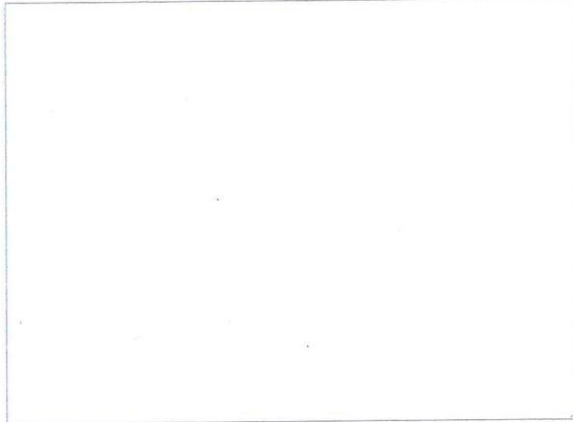
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- 3) If you had the chance to make one statement to policy makers about policies passed that affect principals in the field who must implement them on a daily basis, what would you say?

Confer with educators  
Expressions of hopes, goals, and visions  
Keep in mind all components of the job  
Principal performance not based on state standardized assessments  
Legislation based on research not politics  
Needs to be funded  
Special education key to change  
Technology is not the answer  
Change the entire teaching culture  
Would not change  
Common Core should help



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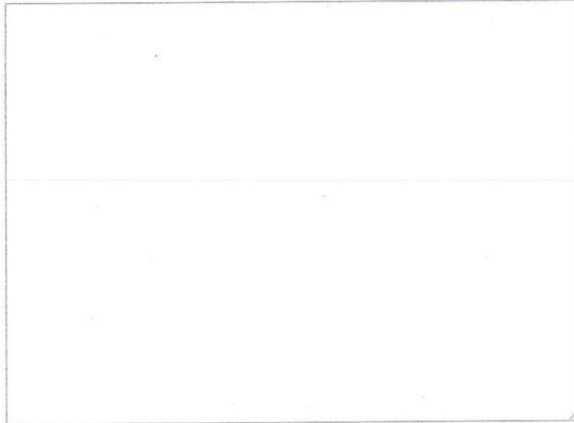
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- 4) Based on feedback from round 1, the highest response rate was from question three, which stated policy makers need to confer with educators before determining educational policies. How do principals in the field, busy implementing current policies, actively engage policy makers in meaningful discussions to facilitate this information?



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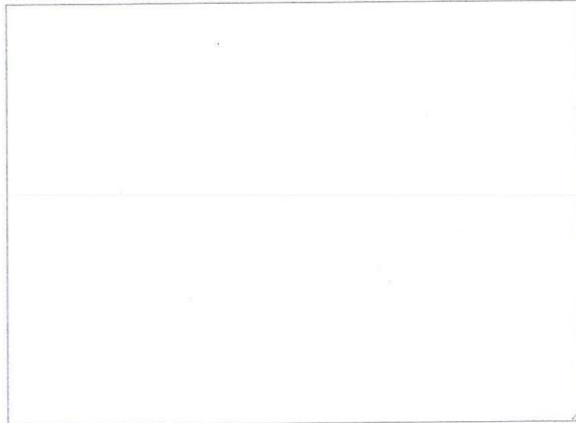
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- 5) How do educators, some of the best in the field, stand together and make a powerful shift in how we are able to influence educational policies nationally and positively effect the lives of our nation's future leaders, students, through public education locally?



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Continue ONLY when finished. You will be unable to return or change your answers.

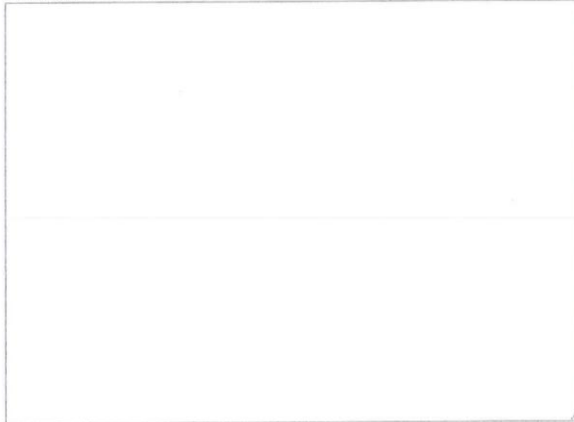
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6) Are there any closing thoughts or questions you would like to share?



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## The Effects of NCLB and Recommendations for Change: A Modified Delphi Study of Principals' Perceptions

Your unique Respondent ID# is: 3173475

[\(Print this page\)](#)

Thank you for taking your time to participate in both the first and second round of this study. Please email me, [mhenry6@utk.edu](mailto:mhenry6@utk.edu), from the address you want your Amazon gift card to be addressed. ***What you do matters, and on behalf of the countless lives you positively effect, including mine, I thank you!***

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## **Appendix C: Phase 2 Documents**

Letter to Honored Principal

Invitation/Consent

Demographic Survey

NCLB Perceptions Questionnaire

Dear Honored Principal,

My name is Melissa Blalock, and I am a doctoral candidate in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at The University of Tennessee, Knoxville (UTK), in addition to being a public school administrator. For my dissertation, I am conducting a study titled *The Effects of NCLB and Recommendations for Change: A Modified Delphi Study of Principals' Perceptions*. The study consists of two phases. You are being asked to participate in the second phase.

Your valuable insight regarding educational policies is exactly what politicians need to hear. Please take **approximately 15 minutes** of your time to complete the following leveled questionnaire developed from a recent nation-wide Delphi survey (Phase 1 of my research study) conducted with your peers. In that questionnaire, 60 principals were asked to give their opinions and offer suggestions to politicians who create educational policy but, who, as we know, are *not* responsible for implementing those policies in the field. Your willingness to participate in Phase 2 of the research study will provide further insight into the challenging role of being an administrator and how educational policies affect your ability to be a leader of change in your field. In return for your valuable time and perspectives on this important issue, *you will be entered in a random drawing for a \$50 Amazon Gift (5 will be rewarded, if you respond by October 18<sup>th</sup>)*.

**If you wish to participate in the study, please open the link at the bottom of this email.** This will direct you to details of the study, including the Informed Consent. Please read the Informed Consent carefully. At its conclusion is a link to 10 brief demographic questions, and then the leveled questionnaire asking you to share your perceptions of the effects of NCLB on your ability to be an agent of change in the field. Proceeding with the survey implies informed consent. Thus, should you may want to print a copy for your records.

I want to thank you for your participation in this doctoral dissertation study. If at any time you need to contact me, the Principal Investigator of this research study, please do so by either emailing [mhenry6@utk.edu](mailto:mhenry6@utk.edu) or calling me at (865) 680-3141. Please know that your participation is highly valued!

With deep appreciation,

*Melissa Blalock*

Melissa Blalock, Doctoral Candidate  
Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies  
UTK

cc: Dr. Ernest W. Brewer, Professor, PI/Director of Federal Programs, Education Administration  
Dr. Patricia Davis-Wiley, Professor, World Languages and ESL Education  
Dr. Jennifer A. Morrow, Assistant Professor, Evaluation, Statistics, and Measurement  
Dr. Mary Lynne Derrington, Assistant Professor, Education Administration

PREVIEW MODE: Responses will NOT be stored.

## The Effects of NCLB and Recommendations for Change: A Modified Delphi Study of Principals' Perceptions

**Doctoral Study Title** – The Effects of NCLB and Recommendations for Change: A Modified Delphi Study of Principals' Perceptions

**Invitation** – You are being invited to participate in this study as an expert in the field of educational leadership. Unfortunately, those who serve the public in education are at the mercy of those policies implemented at a national level. However, the very people enlisted to oversee the implementation of those policies are sparsely represented when the policies are being created. The purpose of this study is to create a forum for experts in the field to discuss the effects of NCLB and offer suggestions for future reauthorizations. The researcher wants to provide a forum for the discussion of this phenomenon that might not otherwise be possible due to logistics, cost, and time. This modified Delphi study will be conducted in two phases.

**Phase 1** – The first phase of this Modified Delphi Study consisted of three open-ended questions asked of 60 principals across the nation. From the first round of phase 1, 14 participants offered feedback. The second round of phase 1 gathered further input and clarity from the initial 14 participants.

**Phase 2** – A five-point leveled questionnaire was developed from the first phase, based on participant responses. The questionnaire is being sent out to honored principals across the nation to collect quantitative feedback.

**Participants** – A list of 449 possible participants was created, including participants' email addresses, from the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) and the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) databases. The NAESP annually recognizes elementary and middle school principals for exceptional leadership in the field with the National Distinguished Principal Award. A list of the 2009 through 2011 National Distinguished Principal's provided 185 recipients, which were obtained via the Internet, along with the recipients' email addresses. In addition to the NAESP the NASSP also recognizes outstanding middle and high school principals in the field with the State Principal of the Year Award. A list of the NASSP 2009 through 2011 State Principal's provided 264 recipients, which was obtained, along with the recipients' email addresses. These two lists were combined to create a total of 449 possible participants. Phase 1 consists of 60 possible participants selected from the 2011 principals honored across the nation to represent the fifty states and nine geographical regions. Phase 2 participants will be chosen from the list to participate if they were not asked to participate in phase 1.

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Thank you for your time and consideration. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Respectfully submitted,  
Melissa Blacklock  
Doctoral Candidate  
Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies  
University of Tennessee Knoxville  
mblacklock@utk.edu  
865-680-3141

Dr. Ernest Brewer  
Department Review Committee Chair  
Professor and P/D/Director of Federal Program  
erbrewer@utk.edu  
865-974-8824

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Demographic Information Questions

1. What is your age?

2. What is your race/ethnicity (check all that apply)?

- Black/African American
- White
- Hispanic/Latino
- Asian/Pacific Islander
- Native American/Alaskan Indian
- Other (please specify)

3. What is your gender?

- M
- F

4. How many years experience do you have as a K-12 educator prior to becoming a principal?

- 0-5
- 6-10
- 11-15
- 16-20
- 21-25
- 26-30
- 30+

5. How many years experience do you have working as a principal in a K-12 school?

- 0-5
- 6-10
- 11-15
- 16-20
- 21-25
- 26-30
- 30+

6. What is your highest level of educational attainment?

- BS
- MS
- MS+
- EDS
- Ph.D./Ed.D.

7. Which geographic setting BEST describes the school in which you serve?

- Rural
- Urban
- Suburban
- Other (please specify)

8. Which age group BEST describes the school in which you serve?

- Elementary
- Middle
- High

Other (please specify)

9. Approximately what is the total number of students served by your school?

10. What subgroups of students are served by your school (check all that apply)?

- Native American/Alaskan
- Native Asian Pacific Islander
- Black
- Economically Disadvantaged
- Limited English Proficiency
- White
- Hispanic
- Students With Disabilities

Continue ONLY when finished. You will be unable to return or change your answers.

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**THE EFFECTS OF NCLB AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CHANGE:  
A MODIFIED DELPHI STUDY OF PRINCIPALS' PERCEPTIONS**

The purpose of this survey is to obtain information about your perceptions of NCLB. Your responses will be kept strictly confidential and your name is not required on this form. It is important you answer each item as truthfully as possible.

**Directions:**

For each statement listed below, selected the number that most closely reflects your opinion. There are five possible choices for each item:

Please select your response for each item below:

- |                             |                 |  |              |                          |
|-----------------------------|-----------------|--|--------------|--------------------------|
| 1<br>(strongly<br>disagree) | 2<br>(disagree) | 3<br>(neither<br>agree or<br>disagree) | 4<br>(agree) | 5<br>(strongly<br>agree) |
|-----------------------------|-----------------|--|--------------|--------------------------|

The following statements refer to your perceptions of the effects NCLB legislation has had on your ability to be an agent of change in your school.

	1 strongly disagree	2 disagree	3 neither agree or disagree	4 agree	5 strongly agree
1. Overall NCLB has brought about change.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2. The federal government has taken a more active role in education.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3. Due to NCLB, we can now compare scores across the state.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
4. NCLB has unified educators.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
5. NCLB has improved staff development.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6. NCLB has guided curricular change.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
7. NCLB has strengthened accountability in the areas of Reading/Language Arts and Math.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
8. NCLB has informed the general public through public reporting.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
9. NCLB has heightened our focus, discussions, and actions around accountability.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
10. NCLB has caused educators to purposefully focus on data including: formative data, individual student data, and data by subgroups (e.g. African Americans, white, ED, SpED).	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
11. The basic premise of equality in education has been a galvanizing paradigm shift for which to direct education decisions and programs.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
12. NCLB has been the best thing to improve education in the last 30 years.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
13. NCLB has placed me in a more direct leadership context as a school representative of results.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
14. The goal of students reaching 100% proficiency is unrealistic.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
	1 strongly disagree	2 disagree	3 neither agree or disagree	4 agree	5 strongly agree
15. NCLB has increased negative attitudes toward public education.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
16. NCLB tests Special Education students on grade level not ability level.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
17. NCLB has shifted the focus of teaching in public education classrooms from curriculum to test preparation (i.e., teaching to the test), which has had a negative effect on student growth.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
18. NCLB has caused schools to focus on recruiting high-achieving students rather than on student achievement.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
19. The increased time and emphasis on Reading/Language Arts and Math has decreased time, breadth, and depth of instruction in other areas (i.e., Social Studies, Science, the Arts, Character Education Programs).	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
20. NCLB has adversely effected the achievement of students who were academically already high achieving.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
21. NCLB has shifted the focus in education on political agendas and not on what is best for students, based on research.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
22. At the high school level, the focus placed on passing high school graduation tests is	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



forcing low-achieving students to drop out earlier for fear of not passing the test.

23. NCLB has increased pressure on teachers, students, and me as the building level administrator.

24. I am now doing more as an administrator with decreasing human resources and funds.

25. NCLB is forcing good people out of education.

26. The punitive impact of not making AYP focuses on punishment first rather than improvement.

27. NCLB is a blanket approach (i.e., one size fits all) for politicians trying to fix what is wrong in public education, and in reality, has just created more work for me as an administrator.

What additional or concluding thoughts would you contribute to the effects of NCLB on you to be an agent of change in your building?

(1000 characters remaining)

Continue ONLY when finished. You will be unable to return or change your answers.

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PREVIEW MODE: Responses will NOT be stored.

The following statements refer to recommendations to the law in the next iteration of the legislation, comments to policy makers, thoughts on engaging policy makers, and closing thoughts.

	1 strongly disagree	2 disagree	3 neither agree or disagree	4 agree	5 strongly agree
28. The focus of educational reform should be on individual student growth.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
29. As educators, we need to be involved in the discussion of how to change the current legislation.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
30. Goals must be attainable. Change 100% student proficiency to 85-90% proficient.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
31. I would remove high school graduation tests.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
32. We should move to standards-based grading.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
33. Provide professional development to make reform consistent.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
34. Allow for a margin of error in test reporting.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
35. Take into account low SES students and students with IEPs.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
36. Placing the burden of fulfilling federal and state mandates is hurting the very people they are intended to protect, the students.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
37. Policymakers must provide the financial support needed to bring mandates to fruition.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
38. Special Education students need to be tested based on ability level, not grade level.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
39. Use the legislation that is in place, but make needed changes to reflect the lessons learned from the major education reform efforts of the last quarter century.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

	1 strongly disagree	2 disagree	3 neither agree or disagree	4 agree	5 strongly agree
40. Politicians who are out of touch with what happens at the building level must spend time learning and understanding the challenges in public education before mandating reforms.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
41. I believe policy makers must confer with educators; education legislation must be based on research not political agendas.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
42. I believe the problems we face are social problems not education problems (i.e., poverty, drug addiction, broken families, mental health problems, and health problems in general). Only after these problems are solved, can public schools be held accountable for achievement.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
43. Policy makers need to keep in mind all components of the job (e.g., anti-bullying, concussion management, new untested evaluation tools).	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
44. My performance should not be based on state standardized assessments (i.e., saying that low test scores over a period of time means that I am not doing all that I can is NOT the case).	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
45. I believe Special Education mandates, and how we address struggling learners, are the keys to changing NCLB.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
46. Technology is a tool, not the answer.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
47. Change the entire culture of teaching. Education is no longer one lesson, whole group, hope students get it, instruction. Educators must focus on what skill needs to be mastered, how students will best understand learning the skill, and then have a plan if students are not proficient in their understanding of the skill taught.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
48. I believe Common Core is the key to changing the National Framework of education.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
49. Mandates and requirements are political quagmires. Visit schools and get feedback; seek out and understand unintended consequences.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
50. NCLB has forced those in education to do even more in the field with decreasing funds and without the necessary financial backing to bring the reform to fruition.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

	1 strongly disagree	2 disagree	3 neither agree or disagree	4 agree	5 strongly agree
51. Much of my job consists of managing/assisting students who are reacting to crises outside of school but carries over to school.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
52. Families expect schools to raise their children yet complain about the outcomes creating a mission that is impossible.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
53. The basic idea of NCLB is good, but there is more to schools and students than test scores alone.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
54. The obstacles of inner city/urban areas must be taken into consideration when developing nationwide education mandates.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
55. NCLB has had both positive and negative effects on the natures of change and my overall individual functioning as a principal.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
56. NCLB has empowered me as an agent of change. Since the mandate, and enhanced accountability/school success dialogues, I am the messenger working with the staff to celebrate success and plan for continuous change.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
57. I can still be an effective agent of change, however, focus on quantitative measures of change are more essential than ever. I must hone my leadership skills to be a change agent for these elements.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
58. Policymakers need to make (take) the time to engage educators by visiting schools, hosting town hall meetings. Local representatives should visit schools in their districts, reach out to state advocacy groups.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
59. Policymakers need the perspectives of administrators in the front lines everyday.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
60. Policymakers need to reflect on paradigm shifts in a field they do not walk in every day.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
61. Educators would gladly take the time to respond if given the opportunity.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
62. As a principal, I need to take the time to seek out policymakers by making appointments with senators/representatives, sending emails, making phone calls, writing letters, working through local/state associations, and using other communication forums.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
63. The best way to engage policymakers is to work through local/state associations to facilitate small group discussions.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
64. Seeing and experiencing school life is the most powerful way to engage policymakers.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
65. As principals, we do not make a difference at a national level.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
66. It is almost impossible to find the time to make a difference in educational policies.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
67. Principals cannot engage policymakers because the latter's decisions are based on party agendas, not real world facts.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
68. Legislators should target high-achieving schools to see what is working there.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
69. Public education is challenging but rewarding.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
70. It is unfortunate educators have so many organizations trying to tell them how to do their job.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
71. Educators do their jobs with pride and are not focused on money.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
72. Educators will always step up to the plate.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
73. Educating children is vital to the success of the future of our county.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
74. The current situation we are facing is creating greater separation between the haves and the have-nots in our nation.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
75. Many career educators spend much of their career trying to make a difference in the lives of children, but their mission is hindered because of political agendas and unrealistic mandates.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

What additional or concluding thoughts would you contribute to policymakers?

(1000 characters remaining)

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### The Effects of NCLB and Recommendations for Change: A Modified Delphi Study of Principals' Perceptions

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**Appendix D: NCLB Perceptions Questionnaire Statistical Tables**

Table D1. Descriptive Statistics for Responses to the Phase 2 NCLB  
Perceptions Questionnaire

Table D2. Descriptive Statistics for Responses to the Phase 2 NCLB  
Perceptions Questionnaire Ranked by Mean

Table D1

*Descriptive Statistics for Responses to the Phase 2 NCLB Perceptions Questionnaire*

No.	Item	<i>n</i>	Mean	SD
1	Overall NCLB has brought about change.	82	4.1951	0.8895
2	The federal government has taken a more active role in education.	82	4.1463	0.8133
3	Due to NCLB, we can now compare scores across the state.	81	3.3457	1.2289
4	NCLB has unified educators.	81	2.5062	1.0901
5	NCLB has improved staff development.	81	2.8148	1.0899
6	NCLB has guided curricular change.	82	3.4146	1.1364
7	NCLB has strengthened accountability in the areas of Reading/Language Arts and Math.	82	3.7561	1.0883
8	NCLB has informed the general public through public reporting.	80	3.5000	1.0488
9	NCLB has heightened our focus, discussions, and actions around accountability.	81	4.0617	0.7753
10	NCLB has caused educators to purposefully focus on data including: formative data, individual student data, and data by subgroups (e.g. Africa Americans, white, ED, SpED).	82	4.0732	0.8378
11	The basic premise of equality in education has been a galvanizing paradigm shift for which to direct education decisions and programs.	82	3.3537	0.8886
12	NCLB has been the best thing to improve education in the last 30 years.	82	2.1098	0.9754
13	NCLB has placed me in a more direct leadership context as a school representative of results.	82	2.9512	1.1251
14	The goal of student reaching 100% proficiency is unrealistic.	82	4.4390	1.0831
15	NCLB has increased negative attitudes toward public education.	82	3.7929	0.9336
16	NCLB tests Special Education students on grade level not ability level.	82	4.1829	0.7983

Table D1. Continued.

No.	Item	<i>n</i>	Mean	SD
17	NCLB has shifted the focus of teaching in public education classrooms from curriculum to test preparation (i.e., teaching to the test), which has had a negative effect on student growth.	82	3.6707	1.0248
18	NCLB has caused schools to focus on recruiting high-achieving students rather than on student achievement.	81	2.7037	1.1600
19	The increased time and emphasis on Reading/Language Arts and Math has decreased time, breadth, and depth of instruction in other areas (i.e., Social Studies, Science, the Arts, Character Education Programs).	82	3.8293	1.1022
20	NCLB has adversely effected the achievement of students who were academically already high achieving.	82	2.8780	1.1518
21	NCLB has shifted the focus in education on political agendas and not on what is best for students, based on research.	82	3.7439	1.1349
22	At the high school level, the focus placed on passing high school graduation tests is forcing low-achieving students to drop out earlier for fear of not passing the test.	81	3.0494	0.9415
23	NCLB has increased pressure on teachers, students, and me as the building level administrator.	82	4.3537	0.6509
24	I am now doing more as an administrator with decreasing human resources and funds.	81	4.4074	0.7662
25	NCLB is forcing good people out of education.	82	3.6463	1.0862
26	The punitive impact of not making AYP focuses on punishment first rather than improvement.	82	4.1098	0.8411
27	NCLB is a blanket approach (i.e., one size fits all) for politicians trying to fix what is wrong in public education, and in reality, has just created more work for me as an administrator.	82	4.0854	0.8999
28	The focus of educational reform should be on individual student growth.	74	4.3649	0.7273



Table D1. Continued.

No.	Item	<i>n</i>	Mean	SD
29	As educators, we need to be involved in the discussion of how to change the current legislation.	74	4.5811	0.5454
30	Goals must be attainable. Change 100% student proficiency to 85-90% proficient.	74	3.7568	1.0757
31	I would remove high school graduation tests.	74	2.9054	1.0419
32	We should move to standards-based grading.	74	3.7432	1.0142
33	Provide professional development to make reform consistent.	74	4.2297	0.7978
34	Allow for a margin of error in test reporting.	74	3.9730	0.7706
35	Take into account low SES student and students with IEPs.	74	4.3378	0.7932
36	Placing the burden of fulfilling federal and state mandates is hurting the very people they are intended to protect, the students.	74	3.8784	0.9293
37	Policymakers must provide the financial support needed to bring mandates to fruition.	74	4.6216	0.6304
38	Special Education students need to be tested based on ability level, not grade level.	74	4.3194	0.8470
39	Use the legislation that is in place, but make needed changes to reflect the lessons learned from the major education reform efforts of the last quarter century.	74	3.8108	0.9681
40	Politicians who are out of touch with what happens at the building level must spend time learning and understanding the challenges in public education before mandating reforms.	74	4.5946	0.7151
41	I believe policymakers must confer with educators; education legislation must be based on research not political agendas.	74	4.7838	0.5005
42	I believe the problems we face are social problems not education problems (i.e., poverty, drug addiction, broken families, mental health problems, and health problems in general). Only after these problems are solved, can public schools be held accountable for achievement.	74	3.7568	1.0757

Table D1. Continued.

No.	Item	<i>n</i>	Mean	SD
43	Policymakers need to keep in mind all components of the job (e.g., anti-bullying, concussion management, new untested evaluation tools).	74	4.2432	0.6938
44	My performance should not be based on state standardized assessments (i.e., saying that low test scores over a period of time means that I am not doing all that I can is NOT the case).	74	3.7432	1.1632
45	I believe Special Education mandates, and how we address struggling learners, are the keys to changing NCLB.	74	3.3919	0.9418
46	Technology is a tool, not the answer.	74	4.4189	0.5929
47	Change the entire culture of teaching. Education is no longer one lesson, whole group, hope students get it, instruction. Educators must focus on what skill needs to be mastered, how students will best understand learning the skill, and then have a plan if students are not proficient in their understanding of the skill taught.	74	4.3378	0.8100
48	I believe Common Core is the key to changing the National Framework of education.	74	3.0946	1.0419
49	Mandates and requirements are political quagmires. Visit schools and get feedback; seek out and understand unintended consequences.	74	4.2027	0.6774
50	NCLB has forced those in education to do even more in the field with decreasing funds and without the necessary financial backing to bring the reform to fruition.	74	4.3378	0.8100
51	Much of my job consists of managing/assisting students who are reacting crisis outside of school but carries over to school.	74	3.6757	1.0541
52	Families expect schools to raise their children yet complain about the outcomes creating a mission that is impossible.	74	3.6081	1.0110
53	The basic idea of NCLB is good, but there is more to schools and students than test scores alone.	74	4.3919	0.7319

Table D1. Continued.

No.	Item	<i>n</i>	Mean	SD
54	The obstacles of inner city/urban areas must be taken into consideration when developing nationwide education mandates.	74	4.2703	0.6430
55	NCLB has had both positive and negative effects on the natures of change and my overall individual functioning as a principal.	74	4.1081	0.6468
56	NCLB has empowered me as an agent of change. Since the mandate, and enhanced accountability/school success dialogues, I am the messenger working with the staff to celebrate success and plan for continuous change.	74	3.5541	1.0019
57	I can still be an effective agent of change, however, focus on quantitative measures of change are more essential than ever. I must hone my leadership skills to be a change agent for these elements.	74	3.8378	0.7539
58	Policymakers need to make (take) the time to engage educators by visiting schools, hosting town hall meetings. Local representatives should visit schools in their districts, reach out to state advocacy groups.	74	4.3919	0.7131
59	Policymakers need the perspectives of administrators in the front lines everyday.	74	4.5811	0.6577
60	Policymakers need to reflect on paradigm shifts in a field they do not walk in every day.	74	4.5139	0.5269
61	Educators would gladly take the time to respond if given the opportunity.	74	4.1351	0.9053
62	As a principal, I need to take the time to seek out policymakers by making appointments with senators/representatives, sending emails, making phone calls, writing letters, working through local/state associations, and using other communication forums.	74	3.9324	0.8436
63	The best way to engage policymakers is to work through local/state associations to facilitate small group discussions.	74	3.8108	0.8491
64	Seeing and experiencing school life is the most powerful way to engage policymakers.	74	4.1622	0.8058

Table D1. Continued.

No.	Item	<i>n</i>	Mean	SD
65	As principals, we do not make a difference at a national level.	73	2.9315	1.2200
66	It is almost impossible to find the time to make a difference in educational policies.	74	3.2297	1.1216
67	Principals cannot engage policymakers because the latter's decisions are based on party agendas, not real world facts.	74	3.5000	1.0812
68	Legislators should target high-achieving schools to see what is working there.	74	3.2297	1.1803
69	Public education is challenging but rewarding.	73	4.5753	0.5714
70	It is unfortunate educators have so many organizations trying to tell them how to do their job.	74	3.8378	0.9730
71	Educators do their jobs with pride and are not focused on money.	74	4.0000	0.8383
72	Educators will always step up to the plate.	73	3.8630	0.9263
73	Educating children is vital to the success of the future of our country.	74	4.9054	0.2927
74	The current situation we are facing is creating greater separation between the haves and the have-nots in our nation.	74	4.0676	0.9772
75	Many career educators spend much of their career trying to make a difference in the lives of children, but their mission is hindered because of political agendas and unrealistic mandates.	73	3.9589	1.0128

Table D2

*Responses to the Phase 2 NCLB Perceptions Questionnaire Ranked by Mean*

No.	Item	<i>n</i>	Mean	SD
73	Educating children is vital to the success of the future of our country.	74	4.9054	0.2927
41	I believe policymakers must confer with educators; education legislation must be based on research not political agendas.	74	4.7838	0.5005
37	Policymakers must provide the financial support needed to bring mandates to fruition.	74	4.6216	0.6304
40	Politicians who are out of touch with what happens at the building level must spend time learning and understanding the challenges in public education before mandating reforms.	74	4.5946	0.7151
29	As educators, we need to be involved in the discussion of how to change the current legislation.	74	4.5811	0.5454
59	Policymakers need the perspectives of administrators in the front lines everyday.	74	4.5811	0.6577
69	Public education is challenging but rewarding.	73	4.5753	0.5714
60	Policymakers need to reflect on paradigm shifts in a field they do not walk in every day.	74	4.5139	0.5269
14	The goal of student reaching 100% proficiency is unrealistic.	82	4.4390	1.0831
46	Technology is a tool, not the answer.	74	4.4189	0.5929
24	I am now doing more as an administrator with decreasing human resources and funds.	81	4.4074	0.7662
53	The basic idea of NCLB is good, but there is more to schools and students than test scores alone.	74	4.3919	0.7319
58	Policymakers need to make (take) the time to engage educators by visiting schools, hosting town hall meetings. Local representatives should visit schools in their districts, reach out to state advocacy groups.	74	4.3919	0.7131
28	The focus of educational reform should be on individual student growth.	74	4.3649	0.7273
23	NCLB has increased pressure on teachers, students, and me as the building level administrator.	82	4.3537	0.6509

Table D2. Continued.

No.	Item	<i>n</i>	Mean	SD
35	Take into account low SES student and students with IEPs.	74	4.3378	0.7932
47	Change the entire culture of teaching. Education is no longer one lesson, whole group, hope students get it, instruction. Educators must focus on what skill needs to be mastered, how students will best understand learning the skill, and then have a plan if students are not proficient in their understanding of the skill taught.	74	4.3378	0.8100
50	NCLB has forced those in education to do even more in the field with decreasing funds and without the necessary financial backing to bring the reform to fruition.	74	4.3378	0.8100
38	Special Education students need to be tested based on ability level, not grade level.	74	4.3194	0.8470
54	The obstacles of inner city/urban areas must be taken into consideration when developing nationwide education mandates.	74	4.2703	0.6430
43	Policymakers need to keep in mind all components of the job (e.g., anti-bullying, concussion management, new untested evaluation tools).	74	4.2432	0.6938
33	Provide professional development to make reform consistent.	74	4.2297	0.7978
49	Mandates and requirements are political quagmires. Visit schools and get feedback; seek out and understand unintended consequences.	74	4.2027	0.6774
1	Overall NCLB has brought about change.	82	4.1951	0.8895
16	NCLB tests Special Education students on grade level not ability level.	82	4.1829	0.7983
64	Seeing and experiencing school life is the most powerful way to engage policymakers.	74	4.1622	0.8058
2	The federal government has taken a more active role in education.	82	4.1463	0.8133
61	Educators would gladly take the time to respond if given the opportunity.	74	4.1351	0.9053

Table D2. Continued.

No.	Item	<i>n</i>	Mean	SD
26	The punitive impact of not making AYP focuses on punishment first rather than improvement.	82	4.1098	0.8411
55	NCLB has had both positive and negative effects on the natures of change and my overall individual functioning as a principal.	74	4.1081	0.6468
27	NCLB is a blanket approach (i.e., one size fits all) for politicians trying to fix what is wrong in public education, and in reality, has just created more work for me as an administrator.	82	4.0854	0.8999
10	NCLB has caused educators to purposefully focus on data including: formative data, individual student data, and data by subgroups (e.g. Africa Americans, white, ED, SpED).	82	4.0732	0.8378
74	The current situation we are facing is creating greater separation between the haves and the have-nots in our nation.	74	4.0676	0.9772
9	NCLB has heightened our focus, discussions, and actions around accountability.	81	4.0617	0.7753
71	Educators do their jobs with pride and are not focused on money.	74	4.0000	0.8383
34	Allow for a margin of error in test reporting.	74	3.9730	0.7706
75	Many career educators spend much of their career trying to make a difference in the lives of children, but their mission is hindered because of political agendas and unrealistic mandates.	73	3.9589	1.0128
62	As a principal, I need to take the time to seek out policymakers by making appointments with senators/representatives, sending emails, making phone calls, writing letters, working through local/state associations, and using other communication forums.	74	3.9324	0.8436
36	Placing the burden of fulfilling federal and state mandates is hurting the very people they are intended to protect, the students.	74	3.8784	0.9293
72	Educators will always step up to the plate.	73	3.8630	0.9263

Table D2. Continued.

No.	Item	<i>n</i>	Mean	SD
57	I can still be an effective agent of change, however, focus on quantitative measures of change are more essential than ever. I must hone my leadership skills to be a change agent for these elements.	74	3.8378	0.7539
70	It is unfortunate educators have so many organizations trying to tell them how to do their job.	74	3.8378	0.9730
19	The increased time and emphasis on Reading/Language Arts and Math has decreased time, breadth, and depth of instruction in other areas (i.e., Social Studies, Science, the Arts, Character Education Programs).	82	3.8293	1.1022
39	Use the legislation that is in place, but make needed changes to reflect the lessons learned from the major education reform efforts of the last quarter century.	74	3.8108	0.9681
63	The best way to engage policymakers is to work through local/state associations to facilitate small group discussions.	74	3.8108	0.8491
15	NCLB has increased negative attitudes toward public education.	82	3.7929	0.9336
30	Goals must be attainable. Change 100% student proficiency to 85-90% proficient.	74	3.7568	1.0757
42	I believe the problems we face are social problems not education problems (i.e., poverty, drug addiction, broken families, mental health problems, and health problems in general). Only after these problems are solved, can public schools be held accountable for achievement.	74	3.7568	1.0757
7	NCLB has strengthened accountability in the areas of Reading/Language Arts and Math.	82	3.7561	1.0883
21	NCLB has shifted the focus in education on political agendas and not on what is best for students, based on research.	82	3.7439	1.1349
32	We should move to standards-based grading.	74	3.7432	1.0142



Table D2. Continued.

No.	Item	<i>n</i>	Mean	SD
44	My performance should not be based on state standardized assessments (i.e., saying that low test scores over a period of time means that I am not doing all that I can is NOT the case).	74	3.7432	1.1632
51	Much of my job consists of managing/assisting students who are reacting crisis outside of school but carries over to school.	74	3.6757	1.0541
17	NCLB has shifted the focus of teaching in public education classrooms from curriculum to test preparation (i.e., teaching to the test), which has had a negative effect on student growth.	82	3.6707	1.0248
25	NCLB is forcing good people out of education.	82	3.6463	1.0862
52	Families expect schools to raise their children yet complain about the outcomes creating a mission that is impossible.	74	3.6081	1.0110
56	NCLB has empowered me as an agent of change. Since the mandate, and enhanced accountability/school success dialogues, I am the messenger working with the staff to celebrate success and plan for continuous change.	74	3.5541	1.0019
8	NCLB has informed the general public through public reporting.	80	3.5000	1.0488
67	Principals cannot engage policymakers because the latter's decisions are based on party agendas, not real world facts.	74	3.5000	1.0812
6	NCLB has guided curricular change.	82	3.4146	1.1364
45	I believe Special Education mandates, and how we address struggling learners, are the keys to changing NCLB.	74	3.3919	0.9418
11	The basic premise of equality in education has been a galvanizing paradigm shift for which to direct education decisions and programs.	82	3.3537	0.8886
3	Due to NCLB, we can now compare scores across the state.	81	3.3457	1.2289

Table D2. Continued.

No.	Item	<i>n</i>	Mean	SD
66	It is almost impossible to find the time to make a difference in educational policies.	74	3.2297	1.1216
68	Legislators should target high-achieving schools to see what is working there.	74	3.2297	1.1803
48	I believe Common Core is the key to changing the National Framework of education.	74	3.0946	1.0419
22	At the high school level, the focus placed on passing high school graduation tests is forcing low-achieving students to drop out earlier for fear of not passing the test.	81	3.0494	0.9415
13	NCLB has placed me in a more direct leadership context as a school representative of results.	82	2.9512	1.1251
65	As principals, we do not make a difference at a national level.	73	2.9315	1.2200
31	I would remove high school graduation tests.	74	2.9054	1.0419
20	NCLB has adversely effected the achievement of students who were academically already high achieving.	82	2.8780	1.1518
5	NCLB has improved staff development.	81	2.8148	1.0899
18	NCLB has caused schools to focus on recruiting high-achieving students rather than on student achievement.	81	2.7037	1.1600
4	NCLB has unified educators.	81	2.5062	1.0901
12	NCLB has been the best thing to improve education in the last 30 years.	82	2.1098	0.9754

## **Vita**

Born in Memphis and raised in East Tennessee, Melissa Henry Blalock attended elementary and middle school in Knox and Williamson County Schools. Little did she realize at that young age what a large part of her life would be dedicated to the challenges and worthwhile pursuits of the world of education. After graduating from Oak Ridge High School, Melissa went on to The University of Tennessee, Knoxville and earned a B.S. in elementary education with a concentration in math in 1994 and an M.S. in curriculum and instruction in 1995. The groundwork was laid for her career in education.

Teaching and later administering for Knox County Schools, Melissa has served students and their families in rural, urban, and suburban areas. Many summers have been devoted to fulfilling myriad educational responsibilities in her roles as both an educator and middle school principal. These included remedial math classes, enrichment activities at the elementary and middle school levels, and the Read 180 program for assisting rising middle school students who were experiencing difficulty with reading to improve their reading proficiency. She enrolled in Lincoln Memorial University's education specialist program in 2002 and graduated with an Ed.S. in administration and supervision in 2003.

After serving as an assistant principal at Christenberry Elementary for five years, life took a new direction. Melissa and her husband Mike welcomed their son in 2008, and during that same year, she started pursuing a doctorate through the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at The University of Tennessee, Knoxville. Melissa is currently an administrative assistant (assistant principal) at Woodland Elementary in Oak Ridge, Tennessee.