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**Grade Level Reconfiguration at the Elementary Level: A Case Study of Select Elementary
School Principals' Reports on Educational Policy when Choosing to
Reconfigure Grade Span and the Impact on Student Success**

by

Michael E. Rivard

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

St. Cloud State University

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Dissertation Committee:

John Eller, Chairperson

Amy Christensen

James Johnson

Laurie Putnam

Abstract

The standards movement and subsequent accountability measures invoked by federal mandate has influenced elementary schools in multiple ways. As school principals navigate initiatives to impact student success, limited research has been carried out on the role of school configuration on elementary students' academic success (Coladarci & Hancock, 2002; Dove et al., 2010; Franklin & Glascock, 1996; Howley, 2002; Paglin & Fager, 1997; Renchler, 2002; Seller, 2004; Wren, 2003). This study examines the relationship between educational policy, accountability measures, and grade span reconfiguration at the elementary level.

Through a structured interviews with six Minnesota school principals who had experienced reconfiguration of grade spans at their elementary schools between 2015 to 2019, the study identifies what select elementary principals report are the effects of accountability measures on decision-making in reconfiguring schools, the subsequent effect reconfiguration had on student success, and how geographic classification of the school community is related to reconfiguring schools.

The finding from this study suggests education policy can affect elementary school principal's decision to reconfigure schools. The majority of current literature concludes broader grade spans at the elementary level has a positive impact on elementary students' success (Alspaugh & Harting, 1995; Howley, 2002; Johnson et al., 2016; Renchler, 2000; Wihry et al., 1992; Wren, 2003). The findings from this study support the opposite conclusion as participants reported more advantages to narrower grade span configurations.

Key words: reconfiguration, grade spans, elementary, principal, policy, accountability

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Chapter I: Introduction

From our very beginnings as a nation, we have felt a fierce commitment to the ideal of education for everyone. It fixed itself into our democratic creed . . . By passing this bill, we bridge the gap between helplessness and hope for more than five million educationally deprived children. We put into the hands of our youth more than 30 million new books, and into many of our schools their first libraries. We reduce the terrible time lag in bringing new teaching techniques into the nation's classrooms. We strengthen state and local agencies which bear the burden and the challenge of better education. And we rekindle the revolution--the revolution of the spirit against the tyranny of ignorance.

(Johnson, 1965)

Since the passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965, our federal legislative branch has become increasingly involved in the education of the nation's students. Prior to 1965, most educational decisions were left to local school districts. Each reauthorization of the ESEA led to different levels of intervention by the U.S. federal government while still allowing the majority of decision-making continuing as local governance. However, in 2001, the No Child Left Behind Act reauthorized under the ESEA included significant accountability measures tied to improved student outcomes (Hayes, 2008; McGuinn, 2006; Minnesota Department of Education, 2005).

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLBA) supported standards-based education based on the premise that setting high standards and establishing measurable goals would improve the outcomes for students. While each state could develop its own standards, NCLBA's expected students to take part in annual testing in certain grade levels to measure academic

progress. Furthermore, qualifications for teachers were more defined at the state level (Vinovskis, 2009).

The purpose of the statewide annual testing was to measure schools making Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). Schools that did not make AYP for two years were identified as “Needs Improvement”. With this designation, schools outlined improvement plans to address the needs identified by standardized testing. If schools continued to not meet AYP, each state created more intrusive interventions into local school control. In Minnesota under NCLBA, schools not meeting AYP had increasing levels of intervention into their Title I dollars (Minnesota Department of Education, 2005). School improvement and initiatives became the norm, and school management and configurations would also come under scrutiny. As Dove et al. (2010) noted in their study of NCLBA, “As No Child Left Behind charges schools throughout the nation with improving academic achievement, patterns of school organizations are being examined, and schools are experimenting with scheduling, grouping, calendars, length of school day, and grade configurations” (p. 274).

In 2015, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) was passed by the U.S. Congress reauthorizing the ESEA, replacing NCLBA, but continuing many of the standardized testing requirements under NCLBA (Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015). With ESSA, states were given greater flexibility in the design of interventions for schools not meeting the standards. For two years, the state of Minnesota studied and implemented the provisions of ESSA at the state level. Struggling schools under Minnesota's Multiple Measurement Ratings continue to have expectations of improvement planning and implementation.

As schools continue to study and attempt various interventions at the local level, successful school reform has eluded many school districts. Under the new Minnesota requirements based on ESSA, more than 480 schools were identified in 2018 to receive varying levels of support over the next 3 years (Hinnrichs, 2018). While new supports continue to be evaluated, schools have been given greater flexibility to address their students' needs (Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015). As noted by Stevenson (2006), "As researchers and policymakers have begun to explore any and all possible ways to maximize learning in this day of educational accountability, grade level span patterns have begun to garner attention" (p. 12).

Problem Statement

Limited research was found analyzing the effect of education policy on the decision to reconfigure elementary schools' grade spans and the impact of subsequent reconfiguration on elementary students' academic success (Dove et al., 2010; Tucker & Andrada, 1997).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to determine how education reform, standards, and accountability measures has affected select elementary principals' decisions in addressing grade span reconfiguration and the subsequent effects on student success.

Research Questions

The following research questions will be used in guiding this study:

1. What do select Minnesota elementary principals report is the influence of educational policy and accountability measures when choosing to reconfigure grade spans at the school they lead?

2. What do select Minnesota elementary principals report as the factors and effects of grade span reconfiguration on students' success?
3. What similarities and differences exists between geographic classification of select Minnesota school principals' communities and the rationale for selection of grade span reconfiguration?

Significance of the Study

A review of the literature suggests the standards movement and subsequent accountability measures invoked by federal mandate has influenced elementary schools in multiple ways. As school principals navigate initiatives to impact student success, little research has been carried out on the role of school configuration on elementary students' success. This study intends to extend research on the relationship between educational policy, accountability measures, and grade span reconfiguration. The study results intend to show what select elementary principals report are the effects of accountability measures on decision-making in reconfiguring schools, the subsequent effects reconfiguration has on student success, and how the geographic classification of the school community is related to reconfiguring schools.

Assumptions

Assumptions are “. . . what the researcher takes for granted relative to the study” (Roberts, 2010, p. 139). This study assumed the following:

- The principals interviewed responded to the questions honestly and without bias.
- Principals in the sample understood state accountability measures.
- The responses received from the participating principals accurately reflected their professional opinion.

Delimitations

Delimitations are factors this researcher used to narrow the scope of the study and clarifies the boundaries of a study (Roberts, 2010). This study was limited by the following:

- The interviews were conducted in December 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic; consequently, face-to-face interviews were not possible due to Minnesota Department of Health guidance. Interview questions may not be answered thoroughly due to this interview platform.
- The study was limited to principals serving in Minnesota elementary schools. The researcher focused on principals as participants because principals can see and interpret the effects of grade level reconfiguration at the school level; however, principals may have a less comprehensive view of why schools are reconfigured. A study of the reports of teachers or district administrators may have different results.
- The possibility of bias existed since the researcher is an employee of one of the districts in the research sample. This district represents an urban setting and was chosen to address the third research question. As the researcher is employed in this district, the relationship with participants will be taken into consideration when analyzing the data.

Definition of Terms

The following definitions are provided to the reader as they do not have commonly known meanings or may be misunderstood in relation to the study (Roberts, 2010):

- *Accountability Measures*: Standardized testing administered to students in the United States used to assess students, schools, and states' ability to raise the achievement of students (Hess & McShane, 2014).
- *Adequate Yearly Progress*: School aggregate performance based on proficiency, participation, and attendance or graduation rates. All students are expected to be proficient in math, reading and science by 2014. Based on the measurement, schools, districts, and states are held accountable for student performance under Title I of the No Child Left Behind Act (Dillon & Rotherham, 2007).
- *Compensatory Education Programs*: Federal funds allocated to elementary and secondary schools to assist in the education of poor and educationally disadvantaged students (Kantor, 1991).
- *Failing Schools*: School continuing to not meet accountability measures identified by United States Department of Education (Wren, 2003).
- *Grade Span or School Configuration*: The range of grades within the same school (Dove et al., 2010). Numerous grade span occurs through the United States school systems.
- *Grade Span Reconfiguration*: Grade levels in a school building are changed (Dove et al., 2010).

- *Title I Funding*: To provide financial assistance to local educational agencies serving areas with concentrates of children from low-income families; to expand and improve their educational programs by various means which contribute particularly to meeting the special educational needs of educationally deprived children (Public Law 89-10, 1965, April 11).

Organization of the Study

The study is organized into five chapters. Chapter I contains an introduction to the study, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, research questions, significance of the study, conceptual framework, assumptions, delimitations and definition of terms. Chapter II includes the review of the literature and is focused on early education reform, standards and accountability movement, and school configurations. Chapter III presents the methods and procedures employed in the study including population and sample, instrumentation, research design, human subjects' approval, data collection procedures/timelines, treatment of the data, and limitations of the study. Chapter IV includes the results of the study as they are relevant to each of the three research questions. Chapter V includes the researcher's recommendations and conclusions of the study as well as limitations, recommendations for further research and for future practice. The dissertation concludes with appendices and references.

Chapter II: Review of Related Literature

Introduction

This literature review will illustrate how educational reform led to the standards and accountability movement. Literature will be further examined in how this movement played a role in the configuration of elementary schools in the United States.

Section one provides an overview of the early history of educational reform in the United States at the federal level and explains the genesis for funding for educationally disadvantaged students through the Elementary and Secondary Schools Act of 1965. This section will also cover the work of a presidential committee and its report, *A Nation at Risk*, which ignited a focus of the United States perceived shortcomings in its education system.

The second section of this review examines the advent and expansion of the standards and accountability movement during the last 30 years. This movement continues through the No Child Left Behind and Every Student Succeeds Acts as school success continues to be delineated, schools are labeled based on performance, and programs are developed to address the needs in states and schools.

Finally, the third section examines elementary school configurations. This section details the early history of school configurations and the relationship between grade span configuration and student success.

Early Education Reform

Elementary and Secondary Schools Act of 1965–The Great Society

The Johnson Administration believed that schools failed not because educators had a vested interest in a system that had shortchanged the poor but because schools had

become inflexible, unimaginative bureaucracies unresponsive to the needs of their most disadvantaged clientele. Consequently, they argued that the chief task was to find a way to encourage schools to break out of their rigid routines and thought that this could be accomplished most effectively not by mandating changes in curriculum, instruction, and school administration but through the promise of new grants. (Kantor quoting President Lyndon Johnson Administration, 1991, pp. 66-67)

The perceived failure of schools in the United States is a relatively new phenomenon in its 250-year history. Prior to the 1960s, local communities and the nation believed the local and federal governments continued to positively address the changes in the society with changes in our education institutions (Kantor, 1991). However, with the enormous deferment of capital outlays during the Great Depression of the 1930s coupled with the mobilization efforts of Americans during World War II, our nation's schools were dilapidated by the 1950s (Bailey & Mosher, 1968). Moreover, overcrowding of schools was becoming problematic as baby boomers entered our elementary and secondary school in the 1950s. During the late 1940s and throughout the 1950s, general school aid bills were introduced in every session of the US Congress; however, none were passed during these years (Bailey & Mosher, 1968).

In the 1950s, federal funds to schools were a much-debated topic in the United States Congress. In reviewing the political history prior to the passage of the ESEA, James Guthrie (1968) described the continued gridlock prior to 1964 in this way,

Historically, a bloc of congressmen (predominantly from Southern states) has voted against federal aid proposals which denied funds for racially segregated schools. Another bloc (predominantly from Northern areas with large Negro populations) has been able to

prevent the passage of proposed legislation which would allow racially segregated schools to participate. (p. 302)

Due to this continued failure of legislation addressing the nation's education system, inequity in school funding occurred throughout the United States.

As a result, the federal role in American education remained marginal until the end of the 1950s (Kantor, 1991). With the combination of the continued need for school construction due to slow downs of expenditures during World War II, growing momentum of the civil rights movement in the early 1960s and President Johnson's War on Poverty, education became a focal point for addressing the inequities in the United States (Kantor, 1991).

The passing of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) was carried out as legislative districts began to change. African Americans left the rural south in vast numbers in the 1950s and 1960s. A large number of congress members and their constituents came to agree with the Supreme Court's 1954 *Brown vs. the Board of Education of Topeka* decision that de jure racially segregated schools were unjust and should not receive federal financial encouragement (Guthrie, 1968). As the 1960s became a time of the Great Society, Kantor (1991) noted:

. . . [as] government officials in the Kennedy and Johnson administrations began to formulate poverty policy in the early 1960s, they turned chiefly to organizations such as public schools or to other state-sponsored programs and to measures such as job training and compensatory education designed not to change the operation of the labor market but to help those on the bottom of society acquire the skills and attitudes they needed to compete more successfully in it. (p. 58)

In 1964, President Lyndon Johnson championed the Civil Rights Act which would impact federal educational legislation. In their study of the history of the ESEA, Guthrie and Springer (2004) quoted the Civil Rights Act of 1964 as providing:

No person in the United States shall, on the grounds of race, color, or national origin, be excluded from participating in, and be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any programs or activity receiving federal financial assistance. (p. 302)

Michael McGill (2015) linked the civil rights movement with educational reform, “[the] civil rights movement translated the goal of providing equal opportunity into an even more idealistic attempt to produce equal educational outcomes” (p. 17).

While the ESEA has its roots in failed legislation of early 1960s, it was civil rights legislation and courts’ decisions that pushed the ESEA to enactment. According to Bailey and Mosher (1968), legislation proposed by the Kennedy Administration between 1961-1963 was routinely defeated as alliances of Southern Democrats, conservative Republicans, and Catholic members of Congress joined together in this effort of stagnation; however, this failed legislative agenda was the precursor of consideration of federal funding to improve the quality of education with an emphasis on improving educational outcomes for disadvantaged students. As Kantor (1991) acknowledged, “Though proponents of federal involvement had fought for more than 20 years to expand the federal interest in elementary and secondary education, they had been thwarted repeatedly by opponents who, for a variety of reasons, were fearful of federal involvement in education” (p. 47).

As the Johnson Administration considered the changes they wanted to enact to fight the War on Poverty, many government advisory boards and task forces recommended “. . . the expansion of federal involvement in education result[ing] from the work of liberal reformers eager to equalize educational opportunity for those long denied the promise of American education” (Kantor, 1991, p. 50).

The enactment of the ESEA in 1965 was a turning point in federal involvement in education. Kantor (1991) articulates the significance of the legislation, “ESEA not only broke through the long-standing opposition to federal aid to education, it also focused attention on the educational needs of poor children and established federal standards to push school districts toward more equitable treatment of disadvantaged students” (p. 49). Albert L. Alford was a financial specialist with the U.S Office of Education in the 1960s and the chief architect of Title I funding. In his advice to education administrators in 1965, he stated, “The basic aim of this legislation is to equalize educational opportunities and assure that every child can develop to his or her inherent mental capacity” (Alford, 1965, p. 483).

The ESEA brought significant budgetary impact to school districts as federal funding tripled from approximately \$890 million to \$2.4 billion between 1965 and 1966 (Alford, 1965; Bailey & Mosher, 1968). All states would receive funding based on a compensatory formula. As a method of funding, “Most policymakers agreed that federal aid should be based on an equalization formula whereby federal funds would be distributed in a compensatory fashion to less wealthy states” (Kantor, 1991, p. 60). The ESEA was an omnibus bill where different “titles” or funding streams were connected to five separate but interrelated initiatives.

Each of the initiatives of the ESEA was aimed at reform to address our nation's schools.

To accomplish these initiatives,

ESEA proposed several strategies of reform. One was to provide support for the purchase of textbooks and instructional materials to beef up the nation's school libraries. Another was to authorize the construction of a national network of regional educational laboratories to conduct basic educational research and disseminate the results to school districts. Still another was to give grants to schools and community groups libraries, museums, universities for innovative educational projects. But by far the most important strategy, and the one that garnered the lion's share of the resources and public attention, was to provide financial aid to elementary and secondary schools for compensatory education programs intended to assist poor and educationally disadvantaged children.

(Kantor, 1981, p. 65)

With swift passage through Congress in 1965, the ESEA became law on April 11, 1965, when signed by President Lyndon Johnson in the one room schoolhouse he once attended. The majority of the funding for ESEA, nearly 90%, went to Title I funding of initiatives and were dispersed by September 1965 (Bailey & Mosher, 1968; Jennings, 2015). As Title I of the ESEA outlines its purpose in expanding and improving educational programming for poor and disadvantaged students, the tenets of the federal reform of education was born. In his 1970 report to Congress as the Director of the US Office of Education's Office of Congressional Relations, Samuel Halperin summarized the ESEA as “. . . a social breakthrough of the first magnitude that promised not only to revolutionize the federal role in education but to equalize educational opportunity for disadvantaged children and eliminate poverty as well” (Halperin 1970, p. 30).

The ESEA was a landmark law that began the education reform movement of the last 50 years. Yet, as Kantor (1991) charges, “. . . it is striking how little ESEA actually asked schools to change their basic routines” (p. 73). As ESEA funding had few ties to accountability, local school districts continued control of educational decision making and responsibility for program design was largely left in the hands of local educators and the states. Furthermore, the ESEA made only a small attempt to reach outside the schools for new ideas as funding for Titles III and IV was significantly less than Title I (Bailey & Mosher, 1968).

Between 1965 to 1980, educational reform and disagreement of the federal government’s role in education continued. Federal funding for Title I of the ESEA doubled between 1966 to 1980; however, per pupil allocation between 1966 to 1980 rose slightly from \$1,321 to \$1,445, respectively, in constant dollars (Jennings, 2015). In 1968, the Bilingual Education Act, also known as Title VII of the ESEA, was the first federal effort to ensure that second language students received some assistance in their first language (Conrad & Gasman, 2015). Free and appropriate public schooling for students with disabilities was signed into law with the Education for All Handicapped Children Act in 1975 as court cases in the early 1970s “established that an absolute deprivation of education to students with special needs violated their due process rights under the Fourteenth Amendment” (Conrad & Gassman, 2015, p. 14). By 1979, the United States Department of Education was created as a presidential cabinet department. Yet, as the 1970s came to a close, the role of the federal government in education would soon take dramatic turns.

A Nation at Risk (1983)

If an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war. As it stands, we have allowed this to happen to ourselves. We have even squandered the gains in student achievement made in the wake of the Sputnik challenge. Moreover, we have dismantled essential support systems which helped make those gains possible. We have, in effect, been committing an act of unthinking, unilateral educational disarmament. (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983, p. 1)

President Ronald Reagan won the 1980 United States presidential election as a conservative movement swept the country. The Cold War between the United States and Soviet Union was in full swing as national deficits increased with the nuclear arms race. In the nation's schools, "state governors and other politicians voiced the fear that other nations were overtaking the United States in the international marketplace due to disappointing levels of American education" (Jennings, 2015, pp. 65-66). According to the data from the report, *A Nation at Risk* (ANAR), this sentiment was based primarily on declining standardized test scores in comparison to other countries around the world (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). The comparison of the United States' educational institution to the rest of the world resulted from the globalization of our society. As Rury (2009) declared, a conservative ethos reemerged as ". . . back to basics and call for an end to the liberal policies and practices associated with the 1960s and 1970s" (p. 213).

During the first two years of the Reagan presidency, budgetary decisions affected the nation's schools. During the 1981 and 1982 fiscal years, there was a near 20% decrease in

educational funding (Clark et al., 1983). The Reagan administration believed that our schools were failing, and the federal government had been part of the problem rather than part of the solution. According to the new administration, educational mediocrity was due to increased federal regulations, and the harbinger of this problem was the newly recognized U.S. Department of Education in 1979 (Clark et al., 1983). Plans for elimination of this department was at the forefront of the Reagan's Administration from the beginning of his presidency. To address the perceived increased federalization of education, the Reagan administration and Congress established block grants to states to “. . . disengage the federal government from educational policy and programs” (Clark et al., 1983, p 189).

During these tumultuous two years for education from 1981-1982, U.S. Secretary of Education Terrel Bell named a National Commission on Excellence in Education (NCEE) at President Reagan's request. Mr. Bell was quoted as saying he was “. . . acting in response to what many consider to be a long and continuing decline in the quality of American education . . . we want to seek a vast renewal of the education establishment of this country and turning more and more toward the pursuit of excellence, to the increasing of standards” (Holten, 1984, p. 26). This NCEE would spend the next nineteen months researching education in the United States and the rest of the world.

The members of the NCEE gathered with President Reagan in October 1981 prior to beginning their work. Gerald Holten, committee member and author of *A Nation at Risk Revisited* (1984), summarized presidential remarks from this meeting on Reagan's principles of education:

Education is ‘the right and the responsibility of every parent,’ and institutions serve to assist families in the instruction of their children’; as in our economy, ‘excellence demands competition among students and among schools’; diversity and pluralism in American education ‘has always been one of the strengths of our society, and we welcome the recent resurgence of independent schools’; we cannot ‘restore educational excellence in schools still plagued by drug abuse, crime, and chronic absenteeism’; and let us ‘begin . . . by allowing God back in the classroom’. (p. 4)

The NCEE was granted authority to begin its work under two laws, the General Education Provisions Act and the Federal Advisory Committee Act. The commission was made up of 19 members who were given no more than 24 months to complete their report.

Notwithstanding the remarks from President Reagan from October 1981, the purpose of the commission was to advise and make recommendations to the nation and to the Secretary of Education.

The NCEE concluded their work and published *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative of Educational Reform (ARAR)* in 1983. With the Secretary of Education’s review and support, the report was presented to President Reagan and published. The report outlines educational dimensions of the risk facing the United States education system. Examples of risks in the report included:

- International comparisons of student achievement, completed a decade ago, reveal that on 19 academic tests American students were never first or second and, in comparison with other industrialized nations, were last seven times.

- About 13% of all 17-year-olds in the United States can be considered functionally illiterate. Functional illiteracy among minority youth may run as high as 40%.
- Average achievement of high school students on most standardized tests is now lower than 26 years ago when Sputnik was launched.
- The College Board's Scholastic Aptitude Tests (SAT) demonstrate a virtually unbroken decline from 1963 to 1980.
- Both the number and proportion of students demonstrating superior achievement on the SATs (i.e., those with scores of 650 or higher) have also dramatically declined.
- Many 17-year-olds do not possess the "higher order" intellectual skills we should expect of them. There was a steady decline in science achievement scores of U.S. 17-year-olds as measured by national assessments of science in 1969, 1973, and 1977.
- Between 1975 and 1980, remedial mathematics courses in public 4-year colleges increased by 72% and now constitute one-quarter of all mathematics courses taught in those institutions. (NCEE, 1983, pp. 8-9)

The NCEE surmised four findings of the education process in their report. These four findings were in the areas of content, expectations, time and teaching. According to the *ANAR* report, the findings on content was “. . . secondary school curricula have been homogenized, diluted, and diffused to the point that they no longer have a central purpose” (NCEE, 1983, p. 18). Students were described as more apt to take general track classes due to increased student choice. Evidence provided by the NCEE on expectations was described in terms of levels of knowledge, abilities, and skills school and college graduates should possess. Students of the United States spent less time on homework and took less rigorous classes (NCEE, 1983). As

Holton points out in *A Nation at Risk Revisited* (1984), “Eighty percent of high-school students take no science or mathematics after the tenth grade; on the average, graduates emerge with elementary geometry as their peak experience in scientific field” (p. 7). The findings on how American schools and students make use of time in comparison to other countries indicated the US spends less time on schoolwork, in the classroom, and on homework (NCEE, 1983). Finally, the evidence presented to the NCEE on teachers illustrated advanced students were not attracted to teaching, teacher preparation programs needed significant improvement, working life of teachers was poor, and a serious shortage of teachers exists in key disciplines (NCEE, 1983).

The report touched a nerve in the American public about the conditions of schools.

Jennings (2015) described the fallout of the report:

Business leaders expressed dismay that American workers were not educated sufficient for higher-level jobs ... as governors and other politicians voiced their fear that other nations were overtaking the United States in the international marketplace due to the disappointing level of American education. (pp. 65-66)

As media attention for *ANAR* was voluminous, the public became more interested in school reform and harkened for more federal involvement in education. A new view emerged, “. . . Title I and other federal aid programs were not doing enough to improve the education of disadvantaged students...” (Jennings, 2015, p. 66).

In measuring the impact of *ANAR*, Picho (1992) reported, “By the mid-1980s, over 200 state-level task forces, blue ribbon commission, and study groups were at work across the country” (p. 279). As Guthrie and Springer (2004) describe the first 7 years after *ANAR*,

The first change wave (1983-1990) stemming from *ANAR* was characterized by states harvesting immediately available low-hanging education reform fruit such as longer school days and years, more required courses, fewer electives, more math and science and less shop math, and higher graduation requirements and college admission standards. (p. 27)

Further reform would soon appear from the *ANAR* related to standards, testing, and accountability. The report “. . . motivated more significant changes in the manner in which American K-12 public schools conduct business than virtually any event or condition preceding it . . . [starting with] the willingness to define student achievement exclusively by standardized tests...” (Guthrie & Springer, 2004, pp. 7-9). In *The Significance and Permanence of Changes in Federal Education Policy*, Clark and Astuto (1986) recognized, “The report suggested a school improvement strategy based on modified standards and requirements . . . standards and requirements under the control of state and local policy-makers” (p. 6). To further accountability, recommendations were made to publish achievement levels of public school (Clark & Astuto, 1986).

As the Reagan presidency ended, the role of the federal government in education had not decreased; instead, a greater interest in the education system was initiated by the states’ governors (Vinovskis, 1999). States continued to embark on changes by increasing requirements of educators and students. As Jennings (2015) described, “Another answer had to be found, and it turned out to be the standards, testing and accountability movement” (p. 66).

Summary

Section one of the literature review provided an overview of the early history of educational reform in the United States at the federal level, funding for educationally disadvantaged students through the Elementary and Secondary Schools Act of 1965, and development of educational policies due to the report, *A Nation at Risk*. These events summarized deficiencies in the United States education system, provided remedial solutions, and led to the accountability movement.

Accountability Movement

Goals 2000 and Education Standards

By the year 2000, all students will leave grades 4, 8, and 12 having demonstrated competency over challenging subject matter including English, mathematics, science, foreign languages, civics and government, economics, arts, history, and geography, and every school in America will ensure that all students learn to use their minds well, so they may be prepared for responsible citizenship, further learning, and productive employment in our Nation's modern economy. (Goals 2000: Educate America Act. Goal #3, 1994)

Governors throughout the United States became among the most active and effective leaders of the school reform efforts throughout the 1980s. One of the governors' most influential organizations, the National Governors Association (NGA) (2007), played a key role in developing interest and support for education goals and standards. At their Idaho meeting in August 1985, the NGA set up seven task forces to make recommendations on how to improve education in the states (Picho, 1989). The results of their efforts were released in their report, *Time for Results: The Governors' 1991 Report on Education*.

Governor Lamar Alexander, chair of the NGA, acknowledged that concerns about jobs and economic well-being were behind the governors' efforts to improve schooling. According to his remarks in *Time for Results*,

Better schools mean better jobs. Unless states face these questions [about education], Americans won't keep our high standard of living. To meet stiff competition from workers in the rest of the world, we must educate ourselves and our children as we never have before. (NGA, 1991, p. 2)

States had continued to struggle economically during the 1980s, and business leaders often cited perceived deficits in the nation's schools. In *The Road to Charlottesville: The 1989 Education Summit*, historian Maris A. Vinovskis (1999) argued:

Southern governors, anxious to spur economic growth in their states, became the champions of improving state and local education as a necessary first step in the revitalization of their economies. As a result, much of the educational leadership in the early 1980s came from southern governors and legislators who called for tougher school standards, better pay for teachers, and more state funds for K–12 education. To overcome the reluctance of state legislators to increase taxes to pay for these improvements, governors frequently had to mobilize the public on behalf of public school reforms. The role of the governors in fostering educational reform in the early 1980s was crucial because they mobilized the public and legislators in their states to support educational reforms. Many of these governors—such as Lamar Alexander (R-TN), Bill Clinton (D-AR), Bob Graham (D-FL), James Hunt (D-NC), Thomas Kean (R-NJ), Richard Riley (D-SC), and William Winter (D-MS)—also became the leaders of the national

movement to improve American schools, based in large part on their experiences with educational reforms at the state level. (pp. 6-7)

State governors met regularly during the 1980s and acknowledged the process of reforming schools would take many years and increased funding.

During the 1980s, the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) was an influential regional organization of southern governors, legislators, and education officials created in 1948 that expressed concerns with education reform (Vinovskis, 1999). In 1988, the SREB Commission for Educational Quality called for the establishment of state and regional education goals. SREB released its *Goals for Education: Challenge 2000* and invited its members not only to establish their own state education standards but to meet or exceed national or international standards. The SREB Commission (1988) argued, “Today, there is wide agreement that SREB states should strive for national standards. And some, particularly governors, assert that international standards are more appropriate now that the marketplace is increasingly global” (p. 5).

As the 1980s were ending, the American public continued to have strong reservations about the direction of the American education system. Chris Picho (1989) cited a Harris poll from August 1989, “Lou Harris summarized the findings of poll of 1250 American adults, saying that ‘the results underscore a growing public sentiment that steps toward improving and reforming the schools have been undertaken at too slow a rate and have not been carried through effectively’” (p. 182).

As a response to the growing discontent of the American public and concerns from the states, newly elected President George H.W. Bush held a summit on education with all governors

in September 1989 in Charlottesville, VA. Led by Governor William Clinton of Arkansas, the NGA had specific goals in mind for the summit to include national education goals (Vinovskis, 1999). At the conclusion of the Charlottesville summit, states and federal leaders had agreed to four basic initiatives:

- Establish a process for setting national education goals.
- Seek greater flexibility and enhanced accountability in the use of Federal resources to meet the goals, through both regulatory and legislative changes.
- Undertake a major state-by-state effort to restructure our education system.
- Report annually on progress in achieving our goals. (Vinovskis, 1999)

The national education goals set targets for improvement in schools. In a joint statement to the American public on how these goals would be developed, President Bush and the governors reported at the conclusion of the summit:

The first step in restructuring our education system is to build a broad-based consensus around a defined set of national education goals. The National Governors' Association Task Force on Education will work with the President's designees to recommend goals to the President and the nation's Governors. The process to develop the goals will involve teachers, parents, local administrators, school board members, elected officials, business and labor communities, and the public at large. The overriding objective is to develop an ambitious, realistic set of performance goals that reflect the views of those with a stake in the performance of our education system. To succeed we need a common understanding and a common mission. National goals will allow us to plan effectively, to set priorities, and to establish clear lines of accountability and authority. These goals will lead to the

development of detailed strategies that will allow us to meet these objectives. (Vinovskis, 1999, p. 40)

Recognizing the need for involvement at all levels, President Bush and the NGA reassured local governments and entities they would be involved in the establishment and implementation of national goals. As the chief executive officers in state government, the governors went further for the first time in acknowledging a need for accountability and authority. As Jennings (2015) argued, “The symbolism of that work was extraordinary. Democrats and Republican governors were saying that although they had labored to improve the schools within their states, they needed a larger federal role to assist them” (p. 67).

Toward the end of his presidency, President Bush’s administration proposed legislation in 1991 called the America 2000: Excellence in Education Act (America 2000). The legislation did not pass for several reasons but did begin the process of non-government groups beginning the exploration of subject standards. The proposed legislation submitted by the Bush administration did not seek legal authority from Congress to create new standards and tests; instead, it would have allowed the use of discretionary funds for this purpose (Schwartz et al., 2000). While this strategy was effective in motivating professional associations to begin developing national standards as they sought presumed funds, it increased friction within Congress. In the wake of an upcoming presidential election, this legislation had significant opposition. As described in *Goals 2000* and the *Standards Movement* (2000), “Democrats remained skeptical about the standards and testing strategy; Republicans worried about an expanded federal role; and administration officials were unhappy about the lack of support” (p. 178). As the 1991 congressional session concluded, America 2000 was filibustered by conservative Republican and defeated.

Although America 2000 failed in passing, it was impactful when considering a conservative president had proposed the national government be involved in local schools' decisions. In effect, as Schwartz et al. (2004) argued, "It legitimized the idea of national standards and tests as a public policy issue, and it enabled grateful Democratic advocates of national standards..." (p. 177). Bill Clinton was elected president in 1992. Having spent the past 10 years as governor of Arkansas, Clinton was a leader in the education reform movement that arose from ANAR. In *Clinton's Education Policy and Intergovernmental Relations in the 1990s*, Susan Fuhrman (1994) described the new president's policy as "... centered around systemic reform, education change through high standards, and coordinated policies in support of standards" (p. 84).

The Clinton Administration's most important legislative achievement was the passing of Goals 2000: Educate America Act (Goals 2000) which was signed into law on March 31, 1994. As a framework for the reform movement in the 1990s, Goals 2000 established the need for education goals and national, voluntary academic standards. This legislation authorized seed money to states to create standards and assessments. Later the following year to effect these changes, the administration used the amendments to ESEA's reauthorization, Improving America's Schools Act of 1993, as the vehicle for change (Fuhrman, 1994). These amendments lowered the threshold that high-poverty schools must meet to use Title I funds for all students in a school; however, all students served by federal programs must be held to common standards and expected to make progress toward the standards of their respective states to remain eligible for Title I assistance (Jennings, 2015). As Christopher T. Cross points out (2010), "The significance of the 1994 bill is hard to overstate ... A major corner had been turned: the federal

government was now firmly involved in the education program of what was happening in almost every district in the nation through Goals 2000 and the ESEA requirements for new standards and assessments” (p. 113).

The passing of Goals 2000 was due to serious congressional compromises to balance the role of the federal government in education. The bulk of these compromises centered on how accountability and flexibility would be implemented at the state level. To hold states accountable for their use of Goals 2000 funds, the statute required states to submit applications to the Department of Education and create state improvement plans (Goals 2000, 1994, §§ 305, 306). These plans were to outline strategies for improving teaching and learning in core content areas and a process for developing or adopting state content and performance standards (Goals 2000, 1994, §§ 306). The hallmark of compromises was states’ ability to decide voluntarily whether they wished to take part in Goals 2000.

Two seminal studies occurred in 1998 and 2000 to evaluate the impact of Goals 2000 in achieving its initiative toward the development of standards and assessment across the United States. The first of these studies by the Council for Basic Education looked exclusively at the rigor of states’ standards in language arts and math. The second of these studies by the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation examined standards and accountability processes in each of the states.

In 1998, the Council for Basic Education (CBE) was asked by *Education Week* to assess the rigor of states’ language arts and math standards. At the time of the analysis, forty-three states had standards for math and 42 had standards for reading. As defined by the CBE, rigorous means “. . . standards must also require student understanding and application of these essential concepts and skills at a level of sophistication or complexity that is appropriate and challenging

to students at a particular grade level” (General Accounting Office, 1998, pp. 90-10). Based on their analysis, 66% of states had very rigorous or rigorous standards in English Language Arts while 93% had very rigorous or rigorous standards in Mathematics (General Accounting Office, 1998).

The study of standards conducted by the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation (TBFF) contradicted CBE’s findings that well written standards were present. The TBFF also examined the accountability measures in place in each state. Overall, the TBFF found the majority of state standards were subpar in respect to their accountability measures. In its findings, TBFF found that only five states combined solid standards with strong accountability, 30 states had mediocre to poor standards and weak accountability, and 12 states determined their accountability measures on mediocre or inferior standards (Schwartz et al., 2000).

In education, standards and accountability were at the forefront of the nation and each state as the 20th century came to a close. Title I of the reauthorized ESEA conditioned the disbursement of funds upon the development of standards, assessments, and accountability systems in each state. Under the reformed Title I criteria, poor children were now expected to meet the same levels of performance and achievement as wealthier students. Schools were expected to provide these children with the instructional quality that would close the gap in achievement between them and more affluent non-Title I students (Jennings, 2015).

No Child Left Behind (2001)

For the first time in the history of Title I, the federal government is dictating the pace of progress required of all schools, regardless of the students they serve and the resources

they have, and requires prescriptive sanctions for low-performing schools that fail to improve scores on standardized reading and math tests. (Sunderman et al., 2005, p. x).

As the year 2000 approached, disillusionment of the role of the federal government in education continued. The creation of standards at the state level in the 1990s for use as accountability measures was without consensus. Many of the states existing student assessments were neither adequately aligned with new content standards nor technically validated making it nearly impossible to make meaningful inter-state comparisons (Vinovskis, 2009). Moreover, regarding student achievement, the Secretary of Education testified to the House of Representatives, “Progress toward closing the gap in achievement between disadvantaged and minority students and their more advantaged peers has stalled in recent years” (U.S. House, 1999, p. 78). As the reauthorization of ESEA was needed in 1999, Congress agreed for continued reform. As William Hayes (2008) points out in *No Child Left Behind: Past, Present, and Future*, “the fact that test scores of American students continued to lag behind scores of children in other developed countries led a large majority in both [legislative] houses to consider a stronger role by the federal government” (p. 10).

In her examination of the ESEA reauthorization between 1999-2000, Vinovskis (2009) argued, the ESEA of 1965 – renamed the Improving America's Schools Act (IASA) – and Goals 2000 were described as,

. . . The cornerstone of the [Clinton] administration’s education initiatives, and since they were enacted for only 5 years, they were scheduled to be reauthorized no later than September 30, 1999, by the Republican controlled 106th Congress. This represented the

first time since inception more than three decades earlier that the GOP-controlled both chambers of Congress at the time that ESEA was slated for reauthorization. (p. 139)

However, partisan battles over reauthorization of ESEA were intense and divisive (Vinovskis, 2009). Three education reform plans were introduced during the Congressional session of 1999-2000; however, Congress failed to reauthorize ESSA on schedule for the first time since its passage in 1965 (McGuinn, 2006). This was due largely to the upcoming presidential election. In comparison to earlier presidential elections, education in 2000 was the most important issue for much of the electorate. Citing research from the Roper Center, Hayes (2008) stated, "In the 1980 election, education was rated twenty-third out of forty-one issues. By 2000, education was named the most important problem facing the nation" (p. 10).

After the 2000 federal election, newly elected President George H. Bush quickly pivoted to education reform and legislation. In January 2001, he released a detailed education initiative, No Child Left Behind (NCLB), highlighting an expanding role for the federal government. In this document released three days after his inauguration,

Bush wanted to close the achievement gap by mandating accountability, high standards, annual academic assessments, and consequences for schools that fail to educate disadvantaged students ... [through] expanding flexibility in the use of Title I funds and reducing the bureaucracy overseeing the numerous categorical programs. (Vinovskis, 2009, p. 163)

While heavily debated during the first and second sessions of Congress in 2001, the bombing of the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, brought most members of Congress to compromise on domestic and foreign policy agenda items. During this process, many

members of the conservative wing of the Republican party had shifted on the issue to increased federal involvement in education. As McGuinn (2006) reported,

The extent to which Republicans had shifted their positions on the issue by 2001 is illustrated by John Boehner (R-OH), the conservative chair of the House Education and Workforce Committee. Boehner had been a leading opponent of federal influence in education in the 1990s, voting to eliminate the Department of Education and remarking in 1995 that ‘it is clear that the current experiment of having the federal government heavily involved in education has failed’; [however, after the Bush election], Boehner acknowledged that ‘I think we realized in 1996 that our message was sending the wrong signal to the American people about the direction we wanted to go education. (p. 170)

Boehner and other moderate conservatives came to embrace NCLB.

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLBA) was passed on January 8, 2002. Schools were expected to begin administering statewide, annual testing in reading and math for students in grades 3-8 by the 2005-06 school year. These assessments would be developed by each individual state based on their standards; however, all assessments and accountability thresholds would be approved by the U.S. Department of Education. The importance of NCLBA was identified by Dillon and Rotherham (2007):

Under NCLBA, states must hold schools accountable for improving student performance. Specifically, the law requires states to set performance targets that schools must meet. The goal is to ensure that all schools improve their performance over time and have almost all of their students score ‘proficient’ on state standardized tests by 2014. (p. 1)

States must create adequate yearly progress (AYP) goals consistent with the following requirements of the law:

- States must develop AYP statewide measurable objectives for improved achievement by all students and for specific groups: economically disadvantaged students, students with disabilities, and students with limited English proficiency.
- The objectives must be set with the goal of having all students at the proficient level or above within 12 years (i.e., by the end of the 2013-14 school year).
- AYP must be primarily based on state assessments but must also include one additional academic indicator.
- The AYP objectives must be assessed at the school level. Schools that failed to meet their AYP objective for two consecutive years are identified for improvement.
- School AYP results must be reported separately for each group of students identified above so that it can be determined whether each student group met the AYP objective.
- At least 95% of each group must participate in state assessments.
- States may aggregate up to three years of data in making AYP determinations. (Dillon & Rotherman, 2007, pp 1-7)

For those schools that do not meet adequate yearly progress, the following accountability measures would be put into place:

- Schools that miss AYP for one year will have no intervention.
- Schools that miss AYP for a second consecutive year are publicly labeled as "In Need of Improvement," and must develop a two-year improvement plan for the subject that

the school is not teaching well. Students have the option to transfer to a better school within the school district, if any exists.

- Missing AYP in the third year forces the school to offer free tutoring and other supplemental education services to students who are struggling.
- If a school misses its AYP target for a fourth consecutive year, the school is labelled as requiring "corrective action," which might involve wholesale replacement of staff, introduction of a new curriculum, or extending the amount of time students spend in class.
- A fifth year of failure results in planning to restructure the entire school; the plan is implemented if the school unsuccessfully hits its AYP targets for the sixth consecutive year. Common options include closing the school, turning the school into a charter school, hiring a private company to run the school, or asking the state office of education to run the school directly. (Dillon & Rotherman, 2007, pp. 1-7).

One of the explanations for the passage of NCLBA was that it was the next step in standards and accountability movement started after the publication of *ANAR*. Recognizing that this reform would be costly, Congress passed and the President signed NCLBA with historical percentage increases to the federal education budget. As outlined in the January 9, 2002 edition of *Education Week*, the U.S. Department of Education's overall discretionary budget increased to \$48.9 billion while Title I funding increased to \$103.5 billion. These were increases of 16% and 18%, respectively, from the previous budget year (Robelen, 2002).

During the next 5 years of implementation of NCLBA, development of assessments at the state level differed dramatically. Concerns were evident by 2003, as U.S. Department of

Education Secretary Rod Paige warned that states “. . . should not lower the educational standards of their test to ensure that they were meeting the adequate yearly progress guidelines” (Hayes, 2008, p. 25). While all states had adopted content standards for reading and math by 2005, only 13 states had their assessments fully approved by September 2007 (Stullich et al., 2007). Furthermore, in the *National Assessment of Title I Final Report*, Stullich et al. (2007) stated, “Because each state has developed its own standards, assessments, and definitions of student proficiency, the content and rigor of these assessments are not comparable across states” (p. 29).

As each state was developing their assessments for reading and math, they were also developing baselines for proficiency and growth expected each year to meet adequate yearly progress. States determined their own baseline for proficiency in 2002-03 which set growth targets expected by each states school to meet adequate yearly progress. As explained by La Floch et al. (2007),

In order to develop AYP targets, each state established starting points (baselines) for their NCLBA accountability systems. With these starting points in place, each state then charted a trajectory of expected progress toward the goal of 100 percent proficiency. States that set higher performance standards tended to have a lower percentage of students scoring at the proficient level and must therefore make greater progress in student achievement by 2013–14. Put simply, states with higher standards are likely to face more challenges in reaching 100 percent proficiency. (p. xxi)

As required by federal statute, there were two ways for states to determine starting points or baselines; each state had to choose the higher of the two starting point options. The first option

was using starting points based on the number of students proficient in the state's lowest-achieving subgroup. The second option for a starting point was to use the score for students enrolled at the school at the 20th percentile among all schools in the state based on enrollment, ranked by the percentage of proficient students (Taylor et al., 2010). In their discussion of inconsistent proficiency standards in *NCLBA Meets Realities*, Sunderman et al. (2005) argued:

By allowing each state to establish their own definitions of what it means to be proficient and, at the same time, requiring states to bring all students to 100% proficiency within 12 years, the federal rules for establishing proficiency standards imposed inconsistent achievement goals on school and held schools in different states to highly uneven expectations for annual test-score gains. (p. 31)

In their final report to the Department of Education on NCLBA implementation across the states between 2002-2007, Taylor et al., (2010) stated, "Each state's definition of proficiency is reflected in its academic achievement standards (previously referred to as performance standards under IASA) for each grade level and subject tested ... Student 'proficiency' has little common meaning across states" (p.30). Flexibility in determining proficiency across the nation led to extreme variability amongst the states in school meeting adequate yearly progress. Taylor et al. (2010) argued, "the proportion of schools that made AYP in 2005–06 ranged from less than 30 percent in two states to 90 percent or more in five states" (p. xx).

For Title I schools, assessing all students and making adequate yearly progress was crucial to remain in compliance with NCLBA and not be identified as in needs of improvement. As shown previously, the number of schools identified for needs improvement varied dramatically by each state. Taylor et al. (2010) summarized the findings of their report:

- A total of 13,103 schools (15 percent of all schools, both Title I and non–Title I) were identified for improvement for 2006–07 (based on test scores from 2005–06 and earlier years). Title I schools accounted for more than four-fifths of all identified schools. The remainder of this section focuses primarily on Title I schools (p. 74).
- Twenty percent of Title I schools (10,781 schools) were identified for improvement for 2006–07. After a large increase between 2003–04 and 2004–05, the percentage of Title I schools identified for improvement increased more gradually between 2005–06 and 2006–07. Nearly three-fourths of the identified schools at the beginning of 2004–05 remained in improvement status two years later in 2006–07 and nearly half were in corrective action or restructuring (p. xx).
- Although only 13 percent of Title I districts (1,728) were identified for improvement for 2006–07, these districts enrolled 40 percent of the nation’s students, or about 18 million students. The number of districts identified for improvement for 2006–07 was similar to the previous year, but the number of districts identified for corrective action increased five-fold (p. xx).
- Required interventions occurred in most Title I schools in Year 1 or Year 2 of identification or in corrective action in 2006–07. However, many Title I schools in restructuring status did not experience any of the four specific interventions named in the law (although it is possible they may have experienced another type of restructuring option). More than one-half of Title I districts in corrective action reported receiving none of the eight interventions specified in the law (p. xxi).

- Forty-six percent of all identified Title I schools in 2006–07 were in either corrective action or restructuring, up from 33 percent in 2005–06 and 23 percent in 2004–05.

The number of Title I schools in corrective action more than doubled, from 1,223 in 2005–06 to 2,663 in 2006–07 (25 percent of identified Title I schools), while the number in restructuring status rose from 1,683 to 2,270 (p. 76).

Intervention for Title I schools in any status of needs improvement were being carried out by the states. These interventions were based on a system of support designed by each state for Title I schools identified for improvement, corrective action, or restructuring. According to Taylor et al. (2010):

The most common mechanisms of state support are those that also existed prior to NCLBA and are outlined in the law: support teams and distinguished educators. In 2006–07, 42 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico reported using support teams and 26 states reported using distinguished principals and teachers as either a primary support mechanism or as an important component of their support system. Other mechanisms of support included regional centers as well as outside consultant groups to outsource some or all of the support to schools and districts. Notably, many states provided differentiated support through “tiered systems.” In tiered systems, the intensity of support and the mechanisms through which the state provided support varied by the number of years a school or district had been identified for improvement or the subgroups for which schools or districts did not make AYP. (p. 114)

In 2006-2007, each state had varying numbers of schools identified as in need of intervention.

The percentage of schools in AYP ranged from 1%-61% (Taylor et al., 2010, p. 114).

NCLBA returned to the political arena in 2007 when the law was scheduled to expire. Congressional Democrats met with President Bush in January 2007 to discuss reauthorization of NCLBA but insisted on additional funding (Vinovskis, 2009). As a result of this meeting, the majority of both political parties agreed on the continuation of NCLBA but argued over provisions within the law.

President Bush's administration recommended NCLBA's reauthorization but was also in favor of changes. The U.S. Department of Education (DOE) continued to support all students becoming proficient in reading and math by 2014. In a change of policy, though, the DOE would allow "states the possibility of using growth models for their annual assessment and provide flexibility in the services and federal monies that would be available to schools identified for improvement, corrective action, or restructuring" (Vinovskis, 2009, p. 200). Further recommendations from the administration included additional compensation for principals and teachers who worked at the nation's neediest schools, expanding charter schools, and federal scholarships for private schools for students at schools that were under restructuring (Vinovskis, 2009).

In striking similarity to 1998 and the Goals 2000 legislation, Congress again had no appetite for reauthorization of the nation's dominant educational policy with an upcoming presidential election in 2008. As observed by Jennings (2015), Democratic presidential candidate Barack Obama "... promised to address NCLBA's shortcomings but did not reject its basic philosophy" (p. 77). Republican presidential candidate John McCain was also in favor of continuation of NCLBA with a marked expansion of private school vouchers (Bracey, 2008). As the election neared, the United States economy had been struck by an economic downturn later

labeled the Great Recession; predictions of economic conditions rivaling the Great Depression were common. Barack Obama won the 2008 presidential election.

President Obama entered the presidency with historical economic concerns. As Conlan and Posner (2011) summarized,

When Barack Obama was inaugurated on January 20th, 2009, the US economy had been in recession for more than a year, the financial system was still teetering near the brink of collapse, and jobs were being lost at an accelerating rate each month...the new president was faced with the worst economic crisis since the 1930s, and the effects on public sector finances were staggering. (p. 4)

The United States government chose to become directly involved in the recovery of the economy to include increased funding for education initiatives. The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) in 2009 was the primary legislative tool used to affect the Great Recession. As part of the ARRA, federal funding of \$39 billion was provided through the education stabilization fund to help states maintain their levels of support for K-12 and higher education during the fiscal downturn (Conlan & Posner, 2011).

As the accountability measures were being reported in 2008, nearly 30,000 schools in the United States had failed to make adequate yearly progress under NCLBA in the 2007-08 school year (Hoff, 2009). By 2011, the percentage of schools not making adequate yearly progress had increased to 49% of all schools (Usher, 2011).

During the first term of the Obama administration, no significant legislation was passed addressing the reauthorization of NCLBA. As the president's political party was in control of Congress through 2010, "Many observers initially assumed that this would lead to a move away

from federal school accountability and a reassertion of the traditional liberal focus on school resources integration, and social welfare programs” (McGuinn, 2015, p. 88). However, as part of Obama’s education reform agenda according to McGuinn (2015), the new administration “. . . increased the federal role in important ways in calling for the growth of annual testing in ESEA, expanding federal efforts to restructure the worst performing schools, and creating a new focus on innovation, charter schools, and teacher accountability” (p. 88). The Obama administration sought other strategies of education policy initiatives, though, through state waivers of NCLBA and providing incentives through the Race to the TOP (RTTT) program as part of the ARRA (Jennings, 2015).

Between 2009 and 2012, nearly every state applied for and received waivers from the requirements of NCLBA (McGuinn, 2015). With reauthorization of NCLBA long overdue and uncertain in mid-2011, Secretary of Education Arne Duncan signaled his intention to grant states more flexibility using his NCLBA waiver authority (McGuinn, 2015; Vergari, 2012). The waivers allowed for flexibility at the state level but did have specific requirements. According to McGuinn (2015), in order to be eligible for a waiver “. . . states had to adopt college and career ready standards . . . develop a plan to identify and improve the bottom 15 percent of schools and develop teacher and principal evaluation systems based on multiple valid measures, including student progress over time . . .” (p. 89).

As schools continued to struggle to meet adequate yearly progress, the Obama administration sought to impact schools’ performance through RTTT grants. While the Obama Administration did not end the accountability mandates of NCLBA, it did implement two different strategies. First, the RTTT program granted federal dollars to states not based on needs

but on the meeting requirements in the application program. RTTT awards to states totaling \$5 billion was dispersed for those who instituted reforms in teacher compensation, charter school sponsorships and other fundamental education policies as part of a grant competition. Along with these requirements, states were expected to adopt the nation's voluntary standards for educational testing; many states signed on to these common standards, partly to help them better compete for RTTT grants (Conlan & Posner, 2011).

As Congress refocused its attention to K-12 education legislation in 2014, it elected to replace rather than reauthorize NCLBA with the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). According to Heise (2017), "Years of legislative inattention, combined with an unusually aggressive use of waiver authority, fueled ESSA's enactment" (p. 1872). ESSA was viewed by many as a reaction against the Obama administration's activism in education (Hess, 2015). ESSA went into effect for the 2017–2018 academic year. As McGuinn (2016) argues, "[while] the law clearly does reduce federal authority in some areas, it is important to note the many important parts of NCLBA that remain in place and where the federal government will continue to have influence over state education systems" (p. 14).

Every Student Succeeds Act

This law focuses on a national goal of ensuring that all of our students graduate prepared for college and future careers. It builds on the reforms that have helped us make so much progress already, holding everybody to high standards for teaching and learning, empowering states and school districts to develop their own strategies for improvement, dedicating resources to our most vulnerable children. And this law requires states to

invest in helping students and schools improve and focusing on the lowest-performing schools and closing those big achievement gaps. (Obama, 2015).

With bi-partisan support, President Obama signed the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) on December 12, 2015, to replace NCLBA and reauthorize ESEA. Young et al. (2017) described the new legislation, “ESSA has two primary goals: to require states to align their education programs with college and career ready standards and to extend the federal focus on equity by providing resources for poor students, students of color, English learners, and students with disabilities” (p. 706). Moreover, federal compliance monitoring of state accountability and school improvement efforts would continue but be considerably reduced.

ESSA continued annual testing and reporting similar to NCLBA. States are, however, were given greater flexibility in selecting the tests they want to use, including the option of having the SAT or ACT substitute for a state assessment in high school. States must also continue to have academic standards that are aligned to annual accountability tests. As was required under NCLBA, ESSA continued the following testing requirements:

- States continue to be required to test all students in math and language arts in grades 3-8 and once in high school, and to test them in science at three different points in time.
 - States will publicly report student test score data for schools and disaggregate it for different subgroups of students (special education, English language learners, racial minorities, and students in poverty).
 - The NCLBA requirement that at least 95 percent of students participate in the tests.
- (McGuinn, 2016, p. 14)

Significant changes around accountability were part of ESSA. McGuinn (2016) described the change in accountability, “Under ESSA, states still have to submit accountability plans to the U.S. Department of Education, but states are given much more latitude in picking their own academic goals for schools, though there must be an expectation of progress and schools must be rated somehow on their performance in relation to these goals” (p. 14). Low performing schools continued to be identified under ESSA, but states were given more flexibility on intervention plans with these schools.

Significant changes from NCLBA in the ESSA legislation included changes in the states’ responsibilities in the adoption of assessments and standards. ESSA departs from NCLBA and enhances states’ power by allowing them to develop, test, and measure academic standards. As Heise (2017) stated in the *Columbia Law Review*,

Under ESSA, states are now yearly testing results’ weight when it comes to annual school, district, and teacher performance. That is, ESSA largely relieves states and districts from the federal consequences that flow from inadequate yearly student academic progress. In its place, ESSA imposes potential federal sanctions and requires states to intervene in only a discrete, small subset of schools: those in the bottom five percent of a state and those high schools with graduation rates below ... ESSA’s narrowed statutory focus is important for policy and political reasons. On the policy level, a focus on the lowest- performing schools may generate the necessary attention to those schools most in need. (pp. 1873-1874)

ESSA places the responsibility of identification and intervention of schools on the states. As Weiss and McGuinn (2017) explained, “Going forward, states will have considerably more latitude to determine their own education agendas...” (p. 7).

ESSA plans started in the 2017-18 school year, and each state must submit accountability plans to the federal Department of Education (Plans, 2015). The accountability goals must address proficiency on tests, English-language proficiency, and graduation rates plus a minimum of one other academic factor such as student engagement, educator engagement, access to and completion of advanced coursework, postsecondary readiness, and school climate/safety (Weiss & McGuinn, 2017). It will be up to the states to decide how much the individual indicators will count, although the academic factors (tests, graduation rates, etc.) will have to be given greater weight. High schools will be judged by the same set of indicators, except that graduation rates of a minimum of 67% (Plans, 2015).

To address accountability plans, schools and districts are considering “. . . studies on the relationship of grade span to other measures of school success” (Renchler, 2000, p. 2). In the beginning of the accountability movement, Wren (2003) opined, “Given the push towards educational accountability, school reform has been feverishly debated . . . [however], grade span configuration and school-to-school transition must be given serious consideration given their obvious impact on student achievement” (p. 11).

Summary

The second section of the literature review examined the advent and expansion of the accountability movement, a summary of the No Child Left Behind and Every Student Succeeds Acts, how schools are labeled based on performance, and programs to address the needs in states

and schools. The third area of the literature review will examine school configuration with an additional focus on the impact of the accountability movement on schools' grade spans.

School Configuration

Introduction

Grade-span configuration of schools are often based on geography, facility plans, enrollment numbers, transportation costs, economic efficiency, or politics (Howley, 2002). Grade-span configurations have been created primarily with a reactive rather than a proactive approach. As Seller (2004) stated, "Configuring schools by grade is a practice influenced by history, psychology, sociology, and pedagogy. With all these social sciences to draw on for knowledge and direction, configuring school remains a process with inexact guidelines" (p. 2).

Research on the effects of grade span configuration for elementary age students is limited. As noted by Johnson et al. (2016), ". . . the effects of grade span on achievement has received scant attention from researchers, and it has not been discussed widely in the literature offering recommendations on educational equity and closing achievement gaps" (p. 385). School transitions occur more frequently with shorter grade span configurations; however, as noted by Wren (2003), these two variables have ". . . received little attention from school administrators" (p. 4).

The debate over the benefits of one grade span configuration over the other has ensued for decades (Howley, 2002). The three variables most often identified in this debate are cost effectiveness, academic success, and social and emotional needs of middle level students (Howley, 2002). This section of the literature review will examine the effects of elementary

grade span configuration on academic success along with a brief history of school configuration in the United States.

United States History of School Configurations

As a unit for school organization the district was well suited to the primitive needs of the time. Wherever half a dozen families lived near enough together to make organization possible, they were permitted, by the early laws, to meet together and vote to form a school district and organize and maintain a school. District could be formed anywhere, of any size and shape, and only those families or communities desiring school need be included in the district organization. (Cubberley, 1922, p. 5)

Until the first half of the 20th century, the United States school's grade span configurations were driven by local communities' needs. Most school were one-room schoolhouses with multiple grades. However, in his analysis of the history of school configurations, Howley (2002) wrote:

Beginning in 1915, when Teachers College professor Ellwood Cubberley proposed that large schools in central locations could provide more and better education and resources, administrators accelerated the merging of one-teacher schools into larger graded schools ... As a result, the K-8 configuration became a popular plan. (p. 24)

During the last 100 years, grade organization continues to be a controversial topic in American education (Paglin & Fager, 1997).

The one-room, ungraded schoolhouse was a popular facility for many years (Franklin & Glascock, 1996). One-room ungraded schools merged to larger schools, thus the introduction of the graded school system in the mid-1800s. As schools gained students, grades 1 through 8 were

usually the norm. In 1900, the predominant configuration was still 8 years of primary school and 4 years of high school. Of the 1920 high school graduates, 80% had attended an elementary school that contained grades one through eight (Augustine et al., 2004; Paglin & Fager, 1997).

The Industrial Revolution impacted the configuration of school. Better transportation and improved roadways led to rural economic decline. Consolidation of schools and districts across larger geographic areas led to school closures as the K-12 school became less efficient to manage (Howley, 2002). The result was districts and schools that had larger enrollments than ever before due to consolidation. The decision to consolidate schools has been based on increasing fiscal efficiency and improving educational quality (Howley, 2002). In his study of the relationship between elementary grade span and achievement, Norwood (2002) declared, “The development of a school's grade configuration by public school administrators is determined by economic considerations such as transportation and limited financial resources due to declining enrollment at the expense of educational implications” (p. 4).

Throughout the latter half of the 20th century, the United States has seen numerous shifts in grade span configurations for early adolescent students. In the 1950s and 1960s, the prominent grade span configurations were K-6, 7-9, and 10-12, as school districts built more facilities for children of the baby boom generation (Howley, 2002). By 1960, four out of five students had attended an elementary school, a 3-year junior high and a 3-year senior high (Alexander & McEwin, 1989). The junior high of 7-9 grades in the 1950s and 1960s was conceived as a preparation for high school and usually consisted of departmentalized classes and uniform daily class periods. Later in the 1970s and 1980s, grade span configurations shifted to K-5, 6-8, and 9-12 due to the advent of the middle school model (Dove et al., 2010). The middle school trend

reflected not only a shift in the placement of the sixth- and ninth-graders but also a conceptual change. The middle school was conceived as a more child-centered institution with responsive practices such as interdisciplinary team teaching, advisory programs, and flexible scheduling (Paglin & Fager, 1997).

The impetus for developing junior high and middle school models was based on the financial efficiencies and social/developmental differences among children, pre-adolescent and adolescent learners; however, in the late 1990s, schools across the country began considering a return to the kindergarten through eighth grade school configuration due to several factors. These schools were labeled as elemiddle schools as they “. . . attend[s] to the needs of young adolescents, aged 10 to 14, in any combination of grades 5-8, but is also part of an organizational structure that includes lower grades” (Hough, 1995, p. 9). In the early 2000s, studies of students’ achievement in grades 5-8 indicated students in these grade levels who were attending schools configured as K-8 were achieving at higher levels than their grade mates attending a middle school configuration (Howley, 2002; Renchler, 2000; Wihry et al., 1992). Furthering the case for K-8 schools, Hough (1995) observed child-oriented programs of school with elemiddle configurations had greater impact on social development for students in grade 5-8 than the subject-centered format of traditional middle and junior high schools.

Research by Paglin and Fager (1997) indicated that grade configurations is most often influenced by geography, student population, financial resources, and community preferences. During the last 40 years, considerable research has occurred in examining middle school and junior high school configuration models as options for early adolescents. Recently, studies have suggested that “. . . low student performance and high dropout rates began to be associated with

transitioning between schools, and school districts began to reevaluate grade [span] configurations as a potential way to address these issues” (Johnson et al., 2016, p. 386).

Measuring student achievement found some standardization due to NCLBA in 2002. Prior to this, studies of student achievement utilizing standardized measures were limited and occurred primarily at the local or state level (Coladarci & Hancock, 2002; DeJohn & Craig, 2002). The vast majority of the studies regarding student success and grade span configurations were related to the effects of the middle school model. Moreover, the majority of the available research regarding grade span configurations as a variable were completed as case studies of specific schools or districts (Dove et al., 2010). Few studies have been conducted on elementary grade span configuration and student success (Coladarci & Hancock, 2002; Renchler, 2002).

Broader Elementary Grade Span Configuration and Student Success

The majority of literature regarding grade span configuration focuses on the middle school grades and the methods and organizational structures employed for students in this middle grade span (Paglin & Fager, 1997). According to Hough (2003), “The most prudent approach to the grade span configuration issue is to develop a bona fide middle school first, then determine which children are at the young adolescent stage before assigning them to grades in that organizational structure. Too often in the past, the reverse has been tried . . .” (p. 3).

As *A Nation at Risk* and the standards movement were impacting the United States’ schools, examination of academic success for eighth graders and their school’s grade span configuration occurred in 1989 in Maine. This study by Wihry et al. (1992) considered the influence of grade span while incorporating six independent variables—socioeconomic status, school characteristics, instructional expenditures, school size, pupil-staff ratio, and teacher

attributes. Wihry et al. (1992) found, “the elementary setting held a distinct advantage over the other three grade spans as a location for eighth grade” (p. 65). Moreover, the findings from this study:

Strongly suggests that the grade span in which the eighth grade is located influences student achievement, even once community SES [socioeconomic status] and various school and teacher attributes are taken into account ... the elementary setting appeared to be the most favorable location for eighth grade in Maine. (p. 68)

As restructuring efforts continued across the United States to increase middle school programming, research continued on role of school configuration and achievement. In 1996, Franklin and Glascock examined student academic success for sixth graders in schools with different grade span configurations elementary (K-6), middle/junior high school (6-9), secondary schools (7-12) and combination schools (K-12) in Louisiana. Using results from the California Achievement Test (CAT) for sixth grade, Franklin and Glascock (1996) found, “the elementary and combination school mean scores ranged from seven to 10 points higher in their scores than middle school students” (p. 21). Comparable results were seen on the math section of the CAT.

In addition to studying how grade span configurations impact academic achievement, Tucker and Andrada (1997) examined how school’s perceived responsibility for student success may impact scores on accountability tests. The study examined 515 schools in Connecticut and the achievement of sixth graders over 10 years. From 1985-1995, fourth grade results were reported in association with schools with K-5 grade spans, and sixth grade results were reported at the 6-8 school even though the students were new to that school at the time of the fall test administration. According to Tucker and Andrada (1997), “For a K-5 school, there was no direct

accountability for the sixth-grade performance of its alumni” (p. 5). In school districts where several K-5 elementary schools fed into a single 6-8 middle school, the reporting of sixth grade students’ scores did not reveal which K-5 schools the student attended. However, schools configured as grade 4-8 or K-6 were perceived as directly responsible for their sixth-grade students.

Results from this study indicated sixth-grade students performed better on accountability tests in schools configured for grades 4-8 and K-6 than those sixth-grade students enrolled in 6-8 grade configured schools (Tucker & Andrada, 1997). The authors postulated that it was possible that schools who do not have students enrolled at the time of testing may have less incentive to improve instruction and professional development may be prioritized for primary grade teachers.

The standards movement led President Bush’s administration to create an accountability system for school across the United States under NCLBA. In a study of student achievement of fifth grade students in elementary schools in comparison to intermediate schools, Combs et al. (2011) examined the differences between fifth grade students’ reading and mathematics accountability test scores in elementary schools (K-5) as compared to intermediate schools (Grade 5, 5-6) for 5 academic years in Texas. The purpose of this study was to examine achievement as a function of grade span configuration.

Very few studies of fifth graders have occurred and placement of fifth graders in a specific school span configuration is “. . . too often made with little regard for which grade organization best serves these youths” (Jenkins & McEwin, 1992, p. 8). Combs et al. (2011) chose to compare these grade span configurations (i.e., K-5, 5-6) because “. . .they represented

the largest configurations for schools in Texas containing fifth-grade students, and they provided a basis for comparing schools with large grade spans to those with smaller grade spans” (p. 13).

According to these researchers, students in fifth grade attending elementary configured schools scored statistically higher than their middle school counterparts in all 5 years of the analysis (Combs et al., 2011). While controlling for school size, economic disadvantages, student mobility and limited English proficiency, Combs et al. (2011) suggested “. . . fifth-grade students who attend intermediate settings in Texas might be at a greater disadvantage relative to their fifth-grade counterparts who attend elementary schools...” (p. 31).

A recent study of the influence of grade configuration and student achievement occurred in Florida in 2016 on standardized test results in math and reading from the 2010-11 school year (Johnson et al., 2016). Due to increased construction and repurposing of schools in Florida in 2010-11, Johnson et al. (2016) investigated how student achievement associated with grade span configurations in a state within a large sample of schools. This study not only focuses on student achievement but also examines the “. . . the distribution of achievement among school with varying socioeconomic status profiles” (Johnson et al., 2016, p. 384). This study narrows the focus on grade span configuration as they argue “. . . the effects of grade span on achievement has received scant attention from researchers, and it has not been discussed widely in the literature offering recommendations on educational equity and closing achievement gaps” (Johnson et al., 2016, p. 385).

In this study, Johnson et al. (2016) used Florida schools to develop an understanding of the range of grade span configurations, configuration distribution with varying student populations, and the influence grade span may exert over student success. Moreover, Johnson et

al. (2016) were also interested in how grade level configuration may vary by the school location. The raw data included 2,603 schools (Johnson et al., 2016). The dependent variables were student achievement in reading, math, and science. The independent variables were Free and Reduced Lunch percentage, White students, Hispanic Students, Black students, and grade spans of schools.

According to the results of this research (Johnson et al., 2016), the most common elementary school grade configurations in Florida are K-5 elementary schools. The majority of Florida elementary schools have a span of three to six grades. Schools with narrower grades spans of less than 3 years were characterized by lower-than-average poverty rates. Rural schools have the highest proportion of schools with more than six grade levels. Regarding academic achievement as measured by accountability tests, broader grade spans were associated with higher math achievement but had a negligible impact on reading. Overall, results from the study suggested “. . . grade span influences achievement directly; specifically, broader grade spans are associated with higher levels of achievement” (Johnson et al., 2016, p. 395).

Narrow Configuration, Transitions, and Student Success

Narrowing elementary school grade level configurations will often result in cluster schools. Cluster schools have one to three grade levels and consolidate teachers and their resources in one building. Some cluster schools include grades K-1, K-2, 2-3, 3-5, 4-5 or single grade levels in elementary schools (Craig, 2006). An advantage of larger groups of same-grade teachers in a school can include increased collaboration. However, disadvantages can include loss of parental involvement when parents/guardians have children attending a number of different schools, the loss of older students as mentors, and an increase in the number of school-

to-school transitions (Craig, 2006). Moreover, it can be difficult to preserve a sense of school identity and provide continuity and stability for students in schools where the students transition in and out at such a rapid rate (Renchler, 2002). As narrower grade spans and increased transitions are directly related, research on both topics is included.

Narrower grade spans in schools does not always mean decreased school size. Measuring student populations using total enrollment gives only half the picture when describing school size (Howley, 2002). When a school has fewer grades per building, more children per grade may attend that school and the dynamic of a larger school setting is created (Howley, 2002). Thus, two schools with the same total enrollment can have a completely different size dynamic depending on their grade spans. Howley (2002) states enrollment per grade is a more useful and improved measure of a school's size.

Alspaugh and Harting (1995) examined the transition effects of grade span organization upon student achievement as schools make the transition from self-contained classrooms to departmentalized classes. Utilizing scores from the Missouri's Mastery and Achievement Test, the authors compared school districts with K-4, K-5, K-6, K-7, and K-8 grade span organizations among 40 school districts in Missouri between 1989-1994. The dependent variables were student achievement in reading, math, science, and social studies. The independent variable was grade span configuration.

Alspaugh and Harting (1995) concluded “no overall achievement difference association with the grade level organization of the school” (p. 145). The authors were also interested in the effects of transition on achievement. Through a longitudinal lens, they found a significant

achievement loss during each transition year; however, most students regain what is lost in the following year (Alspaugh & Harting, 1995).

Stephanie Wren (2003) investigated grade span configuration at school sites, school-to-school transition and their effects on student achievement. As noted by Wren (2003), these two variables have “. . . received little attention from school administrators” (p. 4). The method of this study included a sample of 232 schools from a large inner-city public school district in the Midwest of the United States. Wren utilized the Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP) during 2001 to collect data on student achievement for grades 4, 5, 7, 8, and 11. In her procedures, the two independent variables identified were grade span configuration and school-to-school transitions. The independent variables were based on the number of transitions students made in their respective grade prior to taking the MEAP in 2001. The dependent variable of student achievement was measured by using the percentage of students who passed the MEAP in 2001 (Wren, 2003).

According to the results of this study, there was a significant positive correlation between grade span configuration and achievement while a significant negative correlation existed between transitions and student achievement (Wren, 2003). Wren (2003) explained, “As grade level span configuration increases, so does achievement” (Wren, 2003, p. 9). Moreover, increased events of transitions led to a decrease in student achievement.

Examination of the interdependence between the two independent variables and student achievement was also discussed. When examined independently of each other, Wren (2003) states, “. . . the results express the same conclusion and that is the longer a student stays in a given school the better the student performs” (p. 10). However, when the two variables are

examined simultaneously, it is only the school-to-school transition that is a “. . . significant predictor of student achievement when measured in conjunction with grade span configuration” (Wren, 2003, p. 11).

By 2010, standardized testing under NCLBA was in full implementation, and many school districts were struggling to examine variables that may impact student success as measured by accountability tests. An issue that was studied by Dove et al. (2010) was how to best configure student populations to “. . . maximize all aspects of the educational setting while simultaneously maximizing student achievement” (p. 273). Dove et al. (2010) indicated much of the available research regarding grade level configurations as a variable were completed as case studies of specific schools or districts; however, their study was of all sixth-grade students in Arkansas during the 3-year period from 2005-2007. Moreover, their intent was to “. . . examine grade span configurations on a larger scale in order to address prior methodological weaknesses, particularly small sample size” (Dove et al., 2010, p. 276).

A review of case studies of academic achievement in relation to grade span configurations was also discussed. Dove et al. (2010) recognized, “Although meager, the research is consistent in suggesting that achievement of students in middle grades is higher when they attended schools with a wide grade span configuration, such as K-8” (p. 281). Case studies between 1992-2002 of schools and districts in New York, Connecticut, Indiana, Texas and Maine indicated that students had higher levels of achievement in schools that were configured as K-8 or the combination of K-6 and 7-12 (Dove et al., 2010, p. 281). Their literature review suggested that reorganization to a return to smaller neighborhood schools with larger grade span configuration may lead to improvement in academic achievement.

Dove et al. (2010) included all schools in Arkansas with sixth grade in their study. Those included in the study had to retain their student population for at least 3 years. The dependent variables were math and literacy scores for 3 years (2005-2007) based on proficiency percentage when determining Average Yearly Progress (AYP). The independent variable was grade span configuration of either no transition during sixth grade (oldest grade level of the school), first year of transition is in sixth grade (school with grades 6-8), or second year of transition is in sixth grade (schools with grades 5-8 or 5-7).

Results of the study “. . . revealed no statistically significant differences for the percent [students proficient] by grade configuration” (Dove et al., 2010, p. 290). While local districts may dismiss the results of this study in making decisions about school configurations, researchers did conclude that enrollment, transportation costs, size of school, school goals, fiscal constraints, political tensions, geographic realities, and financial accountability may continue to be important variables. Dove et al. (2010) argue, though, this study “. . . did contribute to the body of knowledge by demonstrating that there was no relationship between grade span configuration and achievement” (p. 293).

Summary

The third section of the literature review examined elementary school configurations. This section detailed the early history of school configurations and the relationship between grade span configuration and student success.

Chapter Summary

This chapter presented a review of the related literature as it pertains to educational reform, standards, accountability, and grade span configuration at elementary schools. In chapter

III, the methodology employed in conducting this study will be presented, including an overview of methods, research design, setting and participant process, and data collection and analysis.

Chapter III: Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to determine how education reform, standards, and accountability measures has affected select elementary principals' decisions in addressing grade span reconfiguration and the subsequent effects on student success. Educational reform to address the needs of struggling schools has been evident for over 50 years as schools continually address students having limited success under changing programming and initiatives. Research has indicated that school configuration or grade span can impact student achievement (Dove et al., 2010; Franklin & Glascock, 1996; Howley, 2002; Paglin & Fager, 1997; Seller, 2004; Wren, 2003); however, the research is limited in its analysis of the impact of grade level reconfiguration on elementary school (Dove et al., 2010; Tucker & Andrada, 1997).

The education reform movement as a product of NCLBA and ESSA has led to numerous methods of intervention for schools across the United States. As standards and accountability have become embedded in policy though the revisions to ESEA, education reform and initiatives have been implemented in schools recognized as failing. Although schools across the country have relied on research-based strategies and practices to affect change, schools continue to fail to meet minimum standards created by their state's education department.

Research Questions

The following research questions are proposed for guiding this study:

1. What do select Minnesota elementary principals report is the influence of educational policy and accountability measures when choosing to reconfigure grade spans at the school they lead?

2. What do select Minnesota elementary principals report as the factors and effects of grade span reconfiguration on students' success?
3. What similarities and differences exists between geographic classification of select Minnesota school principals' communities and rationale for selection of grade span reconfiguration?

Research Design

Case study was the methodology chosen to examine the research questions of principals' reports on grade span reconfiguration due to accountability measures and an assessment of its impact on student success. Respondents in the study were select Minnesota elementary principals whose schools had reconfigured their grade spans from kindergarten through fifth grade to a different grade span between the 2016 to 2019 school years. Utilizing a constructivist perspective as the research framework, this study begins with the assertion postulated by Bergin (2018), "There is no singular, objective reality, as every individual interprets the world in his or her own way" (p. 18).

The case study format allowed for the collection of individual interview responses regarding principals' reports of how accountability measures affect decisions for grade span reconfiguration and its subsequent impact on academic achievement. Creswell (2009) described a case study as a "...strategy of inquiry in which the researcher explores in-depth a program, event, activity, and process, of one or more individuals" (p. 13). Lichtman (2006) described a case study as "...limited to a characteristic, trait, or behavior" (p. 74).

A case study methodology was employed for this study as the behavior examined is the reconfiguration of elementary schools in Minnesota and the role accountability measures may

have played in this decision. This case study was unusual or unique to elementary schools in Minnesota as only 11 elementary schools met the criteria of the study. As explained by Miles and Huberman (1994) with the aspect of unusual or unique circumstances, “The researcher attempts to capture data on the perceptions of local actors ‘from the inside’, through a process of deep attentiveness, of empathetic understanding, and of suspending or bracketing preconceptions about the topic under discussion” (p. 6).

Population and Sample

The Minnesota Department of Education reported that there are 985 independent elementary public schools in Minnesota in 2019. As outlined by Roberts (2010), “Sampling is the process of selecting a number of individuals for a study in such a way that the individuals represent the larger group from which they were selected” (p. 150). In this study, a criterion or purposeful sample was implemented within the population to sample a specific group of principals. As outlined by Patton (2002), “The logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases for study in depth ... studying information cases yields insights and in-depth understanding rather than empirical generalizations” (p. 230). The process for selection in this study was:

1. All Minnesota public elementary schools were included in the populations.
2. Utilizing Minnesota Department of Education (2019) *Data Reports and Analytics—Schools and District* computerized report, the researcher filtered by grade span for each year from 2015-2019.

3. The researcher's report generated a list eleven elementary schools in Minnesota that reconfigured their grade span from kindergarten through fifth grade to two separate school of either:
 - a. Kindergarten through second grade and third through fifth grades or
 - b. Kindergarten through third grade and fourth through fifth grades.
4. Urban, exurban and rural schools was determined based on community populations as defined by the 2010 United States Census (U.S. CensusBureau, 2010). Two urban, two exurban, and two rural schools were chosen.
5. Principals interviewed were present when the reconfiguration occurred and continued in the position for a minimum of two years after reconfiguration.

As the number of principals that met this criterion was eleven, the research utilized a criterion sample of six participants. According to Patton (2002), "There are no rules for sample size in qualitative inquiry. Sample size depends on what you want to know, the purpose of the inquiry, what is at stake, what will be useful, what will have credibility, and what can be done with available time and resources" (p. 244). As this qualitative study's method of data collection was semi-structured interviews, the researcher selected six principals. As argued further by Patton (2002), "The validity, meaningfulness, and insights generated from qualitative inquire have more to do with the information richness of the cases selected and the observational/ analytical capabilities of the researcher than with the sample size" (p. 245).

The three school districts represented in the sample have differing geographic classifications. In this study, geographic classification will be based on exurban, urban, and rural communities as well as district student population. School District A is an exurban community

with an approximate population of 15,000-25,000 and a student population between 5,000-7,000. School District B is an urban community with an approximate population of 60,000-70,000 and a student population of 10,000-12,000. School District C is a rural community with a large town center with an approximate population of 11,000-13,000 and a student population of 3,000-5,000.

The district superintendents of the principals' schools authorized the school principals to take part in the study (Appendix A). The superintendent then notified the principals of the approval to be interviewed. The six principals who served in the elementary schools at the time of reconfiguration consented to participate in the study (Appendix B). Contact information for these principals was available from Minnesota Elementary School Principals' Association.

Instrumentation

Data were collected using a semi-structured, interview protocol or guide. As recommended by Patton (2002),

The interview guide provides topics or subject areas within which the interviewer is free to explore, probe, and ask questions that will elucidate and illuminate that particular subject ... the guide helps make interviewing a number of different people more systematic and comprehensive by delimiting in advance the issues to be explored.

(p. 343)

Since the review of literature did not reveal an exact interview instrument to replicate, interview questions were created by the researcher based on the copious topics from the literature review. According to Patton (2002), "The constructionist evaluator would attempt to capture these

different perspectives through open-ended interviews and observations, and then would examine the implication of different perspectives” (p. 98).

The semi-structured interviews were completed with the study’s participants in December 2020. During a semi-structured interview, “A set list of questions or topics [that] must be covered but permits the researcher and participant to explore topics in greater depth” (Bergin, 2018, p. 132). Semi-structured interviews allow for more flexibility between researcher and participants. As recommended by Lichtman (2006), “Individual in-depth interviewing is a process, not just a predetermined list of questions” (p. 89). While the general structure of the interview is the same for all participants, probing questions were utilized to allow for the researcher to clarify or solicit more detailed information.

Interview questions were created using Castillo-Montoya (2016) four-phase process for systematically developing and refining a qualitative interview. These four phases in question design are:

1. Ensure interview questions align with the research question.
2. Construct an inquiry-based conversation.
3. Receive feedback on interview protocol.
4. Pilot the interview protocol.

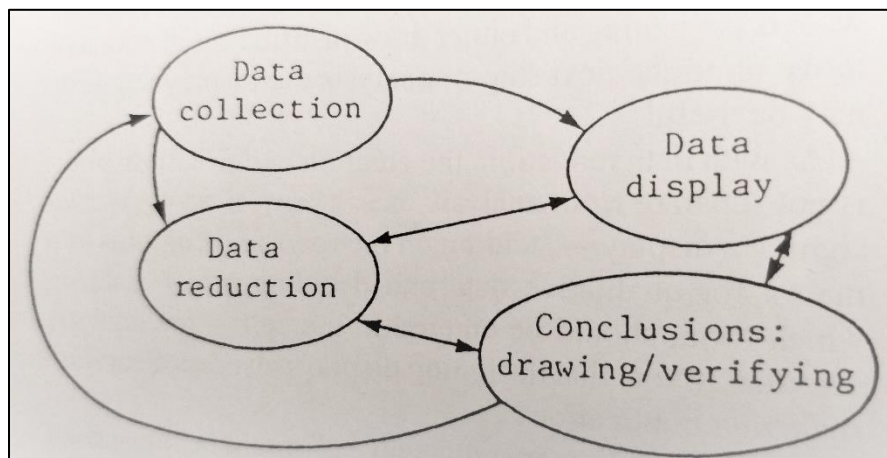
To ensure alignment of interview questions with the research questions, a matrix modeled from Castillo-Montoya’s (2016) guidance on interviewing was adopted by the researcher (Appendix C). To aid in ensuring construct validity, this matrix along with the interview guide was reviewed by the researcher's dissertation committee and doctoral cohort members for feedback. The interview protocol (Appendix D) outlined the procedures that guided the

researcher through the interview process to further ensure internal validity. An initial pilot study was conducted on the interview questions with four doctoral cohort members, who were school principals, to increase instrument validity as these individuals "...mirror the characteristics of the sample to be interview for the actual study" (Castillo-Montoya, 2016, p. 827). Further piloting was accomplished by having all the researcher's doctoral cohort review the interview protocol and provide input. Input from the pilot studies were incorporated to further improve the interview protocol.

Due to the COVID 19 pandemic and guidelines from the Minnesota Department of Health (Appendix E), interviews were completed and recorded through Zoom, a web-based video conferencing tool allowing users to meet online. Interviews were transcribed with the Otter ai., a Zoom application after the meetings were completed. With this program application, interview data was synced over an encrypted connection and stored in a secure data center that has both physical and electronic security. Transcripts were electronically mailed to participants to add or clarify their statements. Participants were provided with information on confidentiality of their identity (Appendix E).

Treatment of Data

Data collected for each interview was analyzed by the researcher. As indicated by Miles and Huberman (1994), "Cross-case analysis multiplies the data set by the number of single cases" (p. 177). Data collection incorporated the Interactive Model of Qualitative Data Analysis espoused by Miles and Huberman (1994) as illustrated below (p. 12):

Figure 1*Interactive Model of Qualitative Data Analysis*

The following procedure occurred for analysis of the data. Interviews were transcribed. Data were reduced and displayed through coding with Dedoose, a web application for managing, analyzing, and presenting qualitative data. As expressed by Patton (2002), “Software doesn’t analyze qualitative data ... [it] facilitates data storage, coding, retrieval, comparing, and linking—but humans do the analysis” (p. 442). As Patton (2002) noted, “Raw field notes and verbatim transcripts constitute the undigested complexity of reality . . . Developing some manageable classification or coding scheme is the first step of analysis” (p. 462). The use of Dedoose assisted in the analysis.

Codes were developed using an inductive process to create a set of codes based on responses of the principals. The Dedoose program quantified code applications and code co-occurrences across the interviews. Using an inductive process for analysis allowed the researcher to generate themes to compare with the literature review and draw conclusions. Using a cross-case analysis, the researcher investigated themes present across cases.

Data Collection Procedures and Timelines

- In April 2020, the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) Analytics Department was contacted through electronic mail to request information on elementary schools in Minnesota. MDE Analytics provided a report to the researcher from the MDE Data Center, *Data Reports and Analytics–Schools and District*. The researcher filtered by grade level for each year from 2015-2019. This report showed eleven schools in the Minnesota that had reconfigured from kindergarten through fifth grade spans to either kindergarten through second grade / third through fifth or kindergarten through third grade / fourth through fifth grade.
- Interview instrument was field tested with a small group of doctoral cohort students from St. Cloud State University in April 2020. All doctoral cohort members field tested the interview instrument in September 2020.
- Preliminary proposal of study with the researcher's dissertation committee occurred in October 2020.
- St. Cloud State University Institutional Review Board process was completed in December 2020.
- Practice Zoom interviews were completed in December with two principals not participating in the study to ensure technology proficiency by the researcher.
- Interviews occurred via Zoom in December 2020.
- Study data was transcribed and electronically mailed to participants to add or clarify their statements in December 2020.
- Data was coded and analyzed from January through March 2021.

Human Subjects Approval

The rights of human subjects were protected throughout the study by following the guidelines outlined by St. Cloud State University's Institutional Review Board. The researcher completed the course on Human Subjects Research required by the Institutional Review Board on July 9, 2020. The following modules were included in this course: *Belmont Report and Its Principles, Students in Research, Informed Consent, and Research in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools*. Approval from the Institutional Review Board was received on December 3, 2020 (Appendix G).

Chapter Summary

Chapter III presented the research methodology of the study. Criteria for the selection of the participants and development of the interview protocol were described. The research design, data collection procedures, and study timelines were outlined in detail. Finally, the treatment of the data was also presented. Chapter IV will present the findings of the research questions.

Chapter IV: Findings

Introduction

A review of the literature suggests the standards movement and subsequent accountability measures invoked by federal mandate has influenced elementary schools in multiple ways (Heise, 2017; Jennings, 2015; Kantor, 1991; Vinovskis, 1999). Grade span reconfiguration may be utilized to address students' lack of success (Coladarci & Hancock, 2002; Dove et al., 2010; Franklin & Glascock, 1998; Howley, 2002; Paglin & Fager, 1997; Renschler, 2002; Seller, 2004; Wren, 2003). As school principals navigate initiatives to impact student success, little research has been carried out on the role of grade span configurations on elementary student success.

The purpose of this study is to determine how education reform, standards, and accountability measures has affected select elementary principals' decisions in addressing grade span reconfiguration and the subsequent effects on student success. Educational reform to address the needs of struggling schools has been evident for over 50 years as schools continually address students having limited success under changing programming and initiatives.

Research has indicated that school configuration or grade span may impact student achievement (Dove et al., 2010; Franklin & Glascock, 1996; Howley, 2002; Paglin & Fager, 1997; Seller, 2004; Wren, 2003); however, this research is limited in its analysis of grade level reconfiguration at elementary schools (Dove et al., 2010; Tucker & Gilbert, 1997). The education reform movement as a product of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLBA) and Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) has led to numerous interventions for schools across the United States. As standards and accountability have become embedded in policy though the revisions to

Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), education reform and initiatives have been implemented in schools recognized as failing.

Findings presented in Chapter IV are organized into the following sections: research questions, summary of research methodology, description of the sample, analysis of data, a summary of the findings for each research question, and chapter summary.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

1. What do select Minnesota elementary principals report is the influence of educational policy and accountability measures when choosing to reconfigure grade spans at the school they lead?
2. What do select Minnesota elementary principals report are the factors and effects of grade span reconfiguration on students' success?
3. What similarities and differences exist between geographic classification of select Minnesota school principals' communities and rationale for selection of grade span reconfiguration?

Summary of Research Methodology

Case study was the methodology chosen to examine the research questions of principals' reports on grade span reconfiguration due to accountability measures and assessment of its impact on student success. The case study design involved individual interviews of principals who experienced reconfiguration of their elementary schools. Participants in the study were select Minnesota elementary principals whose schools had reconfigured their grade spans from

kindergarten through fifth grade to primary and intermediate grade spans between the 2016-17 to 2019-20 school years.

Six principals were selected as respondents in this study. These six principals were selected through the employment of a criterion sample met through the following steps. First, all Minnesota public elementary schools were included in the population. Second, the researcher utilized the Minnesota Department of Education (2019) *Data Reports and Analytics—Schools and District* computerized report. Using this report, the researcher filtered by schools' grade spans for each school year from 2014-15 through 2018-19. Third, using the researcher's filtered report, eleven elementary schools in Minnesota were identified which had reconfigured their grade span from kindergarten through fifth grade to two separate schools of either (1) kindergarten through second grade and third through fifth grades, or (2) kindergarten through third grade and fourth through fifth grades. Fourth, the six elementary schools chosen were located in school districts representing the three geographic classifications of rural, exurban, and urban. Fifth, to be included in the study, principals were present at the time of reconfiguration and for two years after reconfigurations to report on students' success. This final step was determined through the review of schools' websites.

The case study format allowed for the collection of individual interview responses from selected principals. Interview questions, aligned to the research questions, were asked of the six principals to gather sufficient data to answer the research questions. Responses to the interview questions were organized by theme with supporting responses from the principals to provide evidence for interpretation.

To address the research question of similarities and differences existing between geographic classification of select Minnesota school principals' communities and rationale for selection of grade span reconfiguration, further criteria was applied to the three school districts represented by their principals in the study. The three school districts represented in the study have differing geographic classifications based on exurban, urban and rural communities.

Exurban, urban and rural schools' classifications were determined based on population per square mile as measured during the 2010 United States Census (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). School District A is an exurban community with an approximate population of 8,000-12,000 and a student population between 3,000-5,000. School District B is an urban community with an approximate population of 60,000-70,000 and a student population of 10,000-12,000. School District C is a rural community with a large town center with an approximate population of 13,000-15,000 and a student population of 4,000-6,000.

Analysis

Data analysis included organizing the data into common themes and categories. The following procedures occurred for analysis of the data. Interviews were completed via Zoom, recorded and transcribed by the researcher. Data were reduced and displayed through coding with Dedoose, a web application for managing, analyzing, and presenting qualitative data. Codes were developed using an inductive process to create a set of codes based on responses of the principals. The Dedoose program quantified code applications and code co-occurrences across the interviews. Using an inductive process for analysis allowed the researcher to generate themes, display patterns, compare with the literature review and draw conclusions.

Seven codes were identified resulting from the themes and patterns of principals' responses to the interview questions: general accountability demands, Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments' impact to reconfigure, administrator pressures, other reasons to reconfigure, advantages after reconfiguration, disadvantages after reconfiguration, and reconfiguration impact on students. Furthermore, coding of principals' responses allowed for analysis of similarities and differences to address research question three.

Study Results

The results of the study were intended to expand the limited scope of existing research on the effects of educational policy on grade span reconfiguration and subsequent factors and effects of reconfiguration on students' success at the elementary level. The study results also identified similarities and differences existing between geographic classification of school communities and rationale for selection of grade level reconfiguration. The results of this study will be reported by research questions.

Research Question One

The first research question addressed the influence of state academic standards and yearly accountability testing of the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments (MCA) on principals when choosing to reconfigure grade spans. Principals responded both to the pressure of this yearly assessment along with its impact on grade span reconfiguration. Moreover, principals also reported additional data for analysis related to other influencers for reconfiguration to narrower grade spans.

These other influencers on principals were found to relate directly to educational policy and accountability measures. The reported influencers will be presented in the following four

subsections: (1) accountability measures rating schools, (2) community pressure to improve test scores, (3) school culture concerns resulting from MCA performance, and (4) school board pressures on principals to improve schools' MCA proficiency levels.

Research question one: *What do select Minnesota elementary principals report is the influence of educational policy and accountability measures when choosing to reconfigure grade spans at the school they lead?*

INFLUENCE: Accountability Measures Rating Schools

The first influencer examined by the researcher was the impact of school performance ratings due to the MCA's occurring each year in Minnesota elementary schools. The study revealed that the MCA's influenced the six principals in their consideration of reconfiguring the grade spans at the school they lead.

Three principals reported similar concerns with the use of accountability measures to rate schools. These concerns influenced principals when choosing to reconfigure grade spans at their school. Urban Principal 1 stated teachers struggle with academic standards employed in Minnesota and the proficiency targets of NCBLA:

And I think there was a lot of pressure amongst school leaders, and also, teachers in saying, but here are the test scores. And I think that sometimes the bar of Minnesota state standards proficiency is so high that after you're not meeting your target, [it] was deflating. I think as a school, one of the things that we really tried to be intentional with is how do we set realistic goals? How do we push our teachers yet support our teachers and push our students yet support our students to be excited and intrinsically motivated about the growth that they're making? And what measures are we looking at? And how are

they impacting student achievement? And I think No Child Left Behind left us targets that were unattainable.

Exurban Principal 2 reported on the punitiveness of the accountability system as a result of NCLBA and ESSA as impacting the decision to reconfigure:

It's a punitive system. And staff feel the ramifications of a punitive system; they want to do well, they want to do well by their students. And unfortunately, what happens when teachers feel that pressure of a punitive system, those punitive measures get forced onto kids. Not intentionally, by any means, but unintentionally just in how we teach. How we interact [with students], the things we say to kids whether they don't perform well or they do perform well. [This] puts a lot of pressure on everybody. And that is the problem I have with that system is that it's a punitive system instead of a system that recognizes growth.

Urban Principal 1 expressed concerns in the ratings shifting the focus from addressing the social and emotional needs of students to only being concerned with reading and math, "I think some of the demands had a strong shift and an over focus on reading and math ... when you look at some of the challenges of a school that has a high poverty rate, a high turnaround rate, high transitions, there's a lot of social emotional needs that have to happen first." Rural Principal 1 reported similar concerns with how MCA's do not consider the outside-of-school challenges effecting students when choosing to reconfigure:

A huge piece of that was that we educate the students that we have. They live from day-to-day in poverty. And we know that some pretty extreme measures of trauma happened within the school year, and a lot of times, we can't control that. And if it happens, right

before MCAs, we just have to live with that score even though we know that student was going through a pretty rough dramatic time in their life.

Rural Principal 1 stated the influence of yearly accountability measures and specific scoring challenges on grade level teachers as impacting him/her when choosing to reconfigure grade spans at their schools. As Minnesota only reports on third grade and above, teachers in kindergarten, first and second grades invariably have different responses to the pressures of MCA's:

And our K through second staff, we're hearing all that. So it's almost like you have these two teams. You have one team of where the people before you [had the students]. And then the third to fifth grade team, they have that pressure. So they say, well, you guys were getting prepped for this. And then this K[indergarten] through second team says, well, you guys are the ones that had them during those years.

Two principals indicated these accountability measures were highly impactful as an influence to reconfigure the schools they lead. As schools with broader grade span configurations have multiple grade level standards to address, Exurban Principal 2 responded to whether the MCA's impacted grade span reconfiguration:

Yeah, they did. Actually, there was a lot of conversation around being a quote unquote, [a] testing school, and what kind of difference that would make because when you're a pre[school] through five building or configuration of that realm. Only part of your kids test and part of the kids don't test. And so there isn't this climate of this is what we do. This is important. It's [testing is] how we know what you've learned.

For Rural Principal 1, the superintendent of the school district review of scores from MCA's influenced reconfiguring schools in their district. Rural Principal 1 stated, "So I think it [accountability measures] did play, probably for our superintendent, it played a pretty big role in that thought process [to reconfigure elementary schools]."

INFLUENCE: Community Pressure to Improve Test Scores

The second influencer on principals to reconfigure grade spans was due to pressure by their community to improve test scores at their schools due to poor MCA performance. Two principals reported on the pressures they felt from their community. Urban Principal 1 stated, "What's really interesting is that the MCA pressures, I think, they're tremendous. They're looming, always there. They're eyes on how you're performing." Although Urban Principal 1 recognized year-to-year growth in students' proficiency on accountability measures, the pressure to perform well on MCA's continued to be present:

I don't necessarily feel that pressure from our district team. I think the pressure comes from the community. You're seeing huge growth, and you've got tons of kids moving from "Does Not Meet" to "Partial" and we're moving in the right way. I think the pressure, it boils down to just this external view of who you are by the school community. It doesn't honor all the pressure of the other stuff. I don't feel that pressure on a day-to-day basis for MCAs. But I do feel lots of other pressures, it just is that this is the one that feels the most public in the end.

Pressures from the community to improve MCA test scores encompassed more than just parents to Exurban Principal 1. The annual publishing and community announcement of MCA

test scores was the cause of reported stress for this principal and consideration of reconfiguration:

I would tell you the other pressures of a principal are internal kinds of things that you deal with. The MCA is a very public thing. And so it's a different kind of pressure because it's coming to you from outside, not just from your families, but from your community, from the news media, from the state, from the federal government. And so it's a very public thing. And that can cause a lot of stress and anxiety in people.

INFLUENCE: School Culture Concerns Resulting from MCA Performance

The third influencer reported by principals for reconfiguring their elementary schools was the effects of accountability testing on school culture. Three of the principals reported concerns of the pressure to motivate staff and students due to MCA testing.

Urban Principal 2 reported on staff's inability to celebrate growth of students in their school due to the procedures in MCA reporting. While this school had many challenges for the student population outside of school, school culture was deflated due to MCA proficiency scores.

Urban Principal 2 summarized:

Ultimately, it boils down to that one score. That score might be for kids that you had for the minimum window of enrollment. It might be the year that I started when we had 67% turnover in student body from day one [of the school year] to MCA [testing in April]. You think, okay, the fact that we've got attendance [absenteeism] as high as we do, we're really killing it. And then you see that score. And what people don't know is that score actually doubled what it was last year, but it might only be 15% proficiency. But last year, we were only in single digits, so it's deflating.

Pressure on school staff was reported by all principals in the study as they reflected on reasons for reconfiguration of grade spans. Rural Principal 1 discussed the impact of this pressure on school staff, their subsequent interactions with students, and the principal's role in countering false narratives that impact school culture. Rural Principal 1 explained:

I think it was more about the management of our staff and trying to figure out what do we do to help them because if a student sees that a teacher is anxious knowing that this is a huge data point, the students get anxious, too. And I'd always talk to teachers about that, saying I know, I know, it's a huge reflection on you and me as a principal but we need to show the kids that it's still like a normal day. It's a normal assessment. It's not something that we put all our cards or all our eggs in the one basket. And I think for me, trying to reduce my pressure was to reduce that for my teachers. The pressure on me was to try to reduce it for the teachers so they didn't feel like I was going to come back and reprimand them for test scores that we knew didn't always reflect that student's best effort.

Rural Principal 1 further explained his concern for school culture; specifically, the pressure for teachers of grade levels administering MCA's. Rural Principal 1 summarized, "Even though I say that over and over, my staff still felt like they could lose their job, potentially, because of MCAs. And that just, that isn't how we should go through our life. That's just not that feasible."

Motivation of staff to continue to instruct to the standards and not become obsessed with the MCA's was noted by Exurban Principal 1. This pressure was identified as his/her responsibility and was considered when reconfiguring to a narrower grade span, "And you feel a lot of a lot of responsibility in that regard. Because not only are you having to motivate students to succeed, you have to find a way to motivate staff to succeed."

INFLUNCE: School Board Pressures on Principals to Improve MCA Proficiency

The fourth influencer reported by principals for reconfiguring their elementary schools was the experience with school board members to improve MCA proficiency. This principal stated their interaction with a school board member impacted his/her subsequent research on grade span reconfiguration.

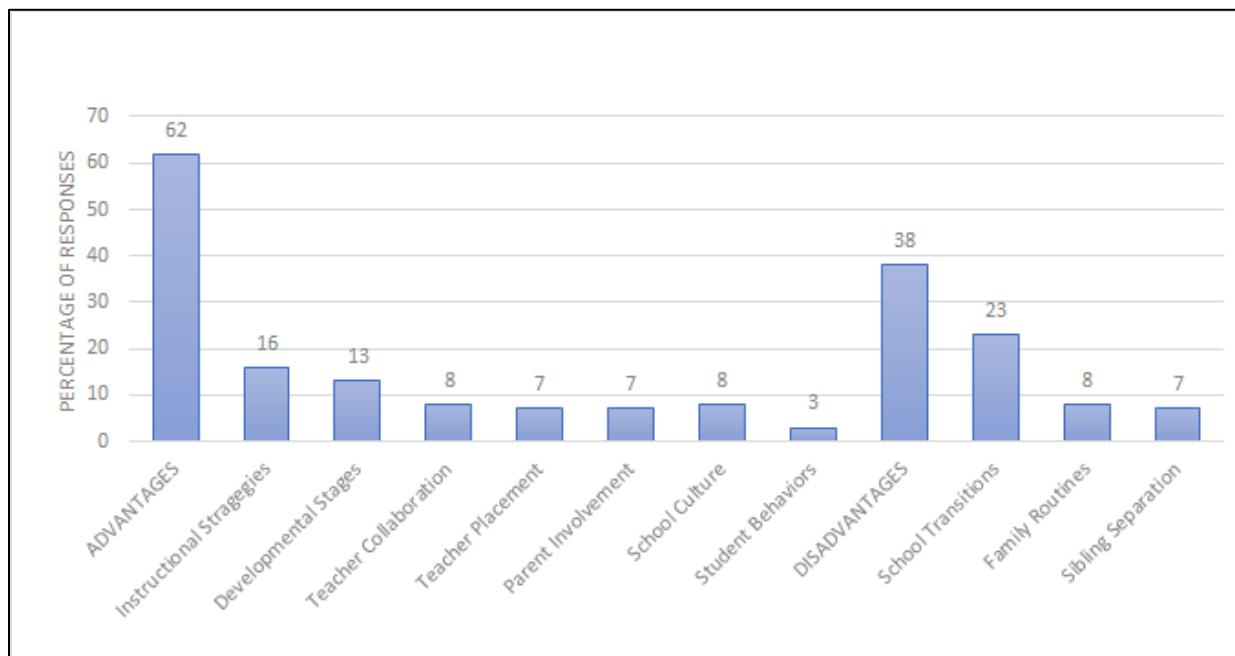
Exurban Principal 2 reported a school board member placed pressure on him/her to consider initiatives or interventions to address the concerns identified by the school board. Exurban Principal 2 explained, “And within the first few weeks in the position, we had a school board member who sat down with myself ... And in in no less than these words, this [school] is a monumental failure, you're a failure. I just got here. But, you know, that's really the pressure from the outside.” After this interaction, this principal began researching other instructional strategies and grade span configurations to consider for his/her school.

Research Question Two

The second research question addressed principals’ reports of the factors and effects of reconfiguring their schools to narrower grade spans had on students’ success. Overall, as principals responded to questions during their interview, more positive responses to reconfiguration were reported as evidenced by “advantages” in comparison to “disadvantages”. This is illustrated in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2

Principal Responses to Factors and Effects of Grade Span Reconfiguration



Research question two: *What do select Minnesota elementary principals report as the factors and effects of grade span reconfiguration on students' success?*

FACTORS: Advantages of Reconfiguration to Narrower Grade Spans

Principals reported seven factors as advantages to a narrower grade span configuration which led to increased student success. These seven factors were improved instructional strategies, decreased developmental stages, better teacher placement, increased teacher collaboration, increased parent involvement, improved school culture, and decreased student behaviors. All six principals reported advantages to narrower grade spans in improving student success.

Advantage #1: Instructional Strategies. The first factor identified as an advantage to reconfiguration as impacting students' success was improved and focused instructional strategies. Principals reported increased students' success due to prioritizing literacy, increased student voice, departmentalization, and flexible grouping. Rural Principal 1 explained how reconfiguration aided his/her school in prioritizing literacy:

So I think, honing in our efforts and knowing that with the *Read Well by Third Grade* plan, you're really focused in on that. As an administrator, I'm able to focus in on that. So I'm not trying to almost live in two different worlds, that four or five [grades] was that next level. Getting reading to learn, basically, instead of learning to read. We can focus in on our staff to do Title I, we can put more effort into interventions. For staff development reasons, it's nice. Because I can stress guided reading and guided math. I can train for primary, basically, instead of primary and intermediate. So it's helped that way.

Urban Principal 2 reflected on many areas of instructional practice and strategies impacted by reconfiguration to narrower grade spans:

I felt like it's the first time that we saw a really high level of student voice in our building. Academically, when you've got that many people and you have built-in time for planning and you have academic lead teachers in each grade, I mean the focus on standards and grade level delivery was just awesome. I feel like our staff was better equipped to manage. It was the first time in my years of leadership where you could truly dig in and do the Conscious Discipline stuff that we had been trained on for all those years.

Exurban Principal 2 summarized how departmentalizing for content areas affected student success at his/her school:

And teachers were able to focus on a couple subject areas instead of four or five subject areas. And they really became more familiar with the standards in those content areas that they taught, and could figure out those standards ... By configuring our grades that way and departmentalizing, our teachers became much more impactful and increased their expertise in the content area that they taught ... it provided a lot of flexibility for us to flexibly group students.

Advantage #2: Developmental Stages. The second factor identified as an advantage to reconfiguration as impacting students' success was fewer developmental stages for staff to address. Urban Principal 1 explained the students at his/her school had different social and emotional needs due to their age, "If I look at student's success and I look at that social, emotional realm, I think [its positive] having a building that specializes in littles and understands who littles are." Exurban Principal 1 and Rural Principal 1 agreed the developmental level of students affects how they operate their building to ensure success for students. Rural Principal 1 explained, "I think the biggest advantage is you can really hone in on those students that you're serving because before we knew we were serving kindergarten through five. Now we're serving kindergarten through three." Exurban Principal 2 reported on this factor impacting students' success:

What we know about kids in an elementary building is there is such a difference between K[indergarten] and [grade] five, there's such a difference between [grade] one and [grade] four, and so on and so forth. And when you have a building that is on the same wavelength, all trying to go toward a similar goal, that does make a difference in student achievement.

Rural Principal 2 reported on the students' organization skills as a variable of their development. With a narrowing grade span configuration, school staff were able to prepare students to be better prepared for classroom instruction. He/She stated:

Whereas the lockers at the middle school are outside their classroom, we try to keep that world a little bit smaller here. They go to specialists, they go as a homeroom. They don't go as a sprinkling of different home rooms, but they're still learning to travel and understand that they need to be prepared when I leave my room and I go someplace else. I can't just go right back and grab whatever I forgot. So we work on making sure you think about things and prepare yourself for what's coming next. Their schedule is very consistent. So it builds in predictability. And I think that helps kids a lot.

Rural Principal 1 commented on the physical development of students as students navigate the school building. This principal reported that students were more successful in schools with narrower grade spans due to decreased concerns with physical size of school mates. He/She reported:

No space issues with fifth graders coming down the hallway and then the kindergarteners will be going down the other side of the hallway. And that's pretty intimidating for a kindergartner to see a fifth grader. Whether the fifth graders were just louder and more rambunctious. They're still great kids, it's just that it's just a such a big span when you're a kindergartner. So we see that as being much more successful [for students].

Urban Principal 1 concluded how the development of children can significantly impact student success when configuring schools, "I think students' success is we know who they are

because we are so narrow with our developmental window now . . . the beautiful thing is you can really bathe in child development as we do as elementary educators.”

Advantage #3: Teacher Collaboration. The third factor identified as an advantage to reconfiguration in impacting students’ success was increased teacher collaboration. Exurban Principal 1 reported teachers not only increased their level of collaboration but were also welcoming of colleagues into their classrooms to share effective instructional strategies. Exurban Principal 1 explained:

We’re able to support each other as educators in a different [way] because we’re all on the same page . . . Teachers really welcome others in to see what’s going on in my classroom, why my students are achieving this way and see if we can replicate more of that. I feel like that level of collaboration [has] happened between teachers.

Rural Principal 1 reported that teacher collaboration increased significantly after reconfiguration with deeper analysis of state standards occurring leading to students’ success. He/She stated, “But when we’re talking about putting our standards together and making sure that we’re teaching those standards . . . looking at that vertically, as well as horizontal, our staff really can work and be pretty cohesive.” This principal further described how having all teachers from two grade levels employed in their district located in one building increased student success with targeted interventions:

We have all of the fifth-grade materials that we all need to share under the same roof and the same for fourth grade. Their ability to collaborate by just bumping into each other, instead of having to have a vertical staff development component that we have to find the time for [was advantageous]. The communication that is available, just based on us being

in the same building is so critical. Also, as a kiddo goes from fourth grade to fifth grade and a fifth-grade teacher is looking at a child for TAT, Teacher Assistance Team, it's super easy to just call or stop down and say, 'Golly, did you see some of these same things with this young person? What were some of the things you tried' because you can read things in a cum file that maybe somebody left, or perhaps there's even some notes in the tip file from the year prior. But having that authentic conversation, you really get the nuances of what was tried and maybe why that little kiddo was struggling in that way.

Advantage #4: Teacher Placement. The fourth factor identified as an advantage to reconfiguration in impacting students' success was teacher placement in either a primary or intermediate setting along with increasing access to teacher leaders. Exurban Principal 1 stated, "Some staff are definitely better intermediate teachers and definitely better primary teachers. So from a student success standpoint, you can also nurture your teachers in a different way when you're reconfigured." Rural Principal 1 reported that teachers were able to become specialist in content areas. He/She stated:

As far as students transitioning between classrooms, my fifth-grade group [of teachers], they did really well. They had a teacher who loved science and a teacher who love math; they had a teacher who loved reading, and they would make those rotations. Those teachers became very skilled at teaching 30 students at a time, science, math, or reading.

Instead of trying to be a master of all those areas, they were able to be a master of one.

Urban Principal 1 reported that larger number of teachers placed together in one grade level at a school site impacted teacher development. In ensuring peer support, Urban Principal 1 explained:

We have more teachers at a grade level, which has been awesome for teacher leadership in watching the way that our grade level teams collaborate. For example, we have eight kindergarten teachers who are able to have one or two veteran teachers [for peer support].

Advantage #5: Parent Involvement. The fifth factor reported by principals as an advantage of reconfiguration was an increase in parent support and involvement. Urban Principal 2 reported that parent support was essential to reconfiguration at their school and led to increased students' success. While a few parents expressed concerns with sibling being separated between two buildings, the majority of families were in support. He/She summarized:

And then when we started to contact families, I really thought the biggest concern was going to be we have siblings and now they're split at different buildings. And we did have a little bit of that, but it was not nearly what I had expected. And families were actually really excited about the idea of their kids getting developmentally appropriate services. They thought that it would be best for their kids. And so then that's when we made the decision because Superintendent A was not on board with it unless our families were.

Exurban Principal 2 reported an increase in parent involvement after reconfiguration. As this principal's school was intermediate, past history showed decreased parent involvement for those students in the upper elementary grade levels. However, Exurban Principal 2 stated increased parent involvement due to reconfiguration impacted students' success:

I think three through five [grade] parents when we reconfigured took school much more seriously than they had. And I can't tell you why. We were able to do much more community related activities. Things like a family fun night that were really geared to a

specific age of student rather than from 5- to 11-year old's trying to figure out how to do those things. We saw parents more involved in their school experience with their kids than they had been before. You get in the kindergarten, primary grades, first and second grade, you get a lot of parent volunteers all of the time. And you don't necessarily see that by the time you get to three through five [grade]. We saw a dramatic increase in our parent involvement in volunteering in our school. Once we reconfigured it was impressive to be honest with you. And when kids know their parents are involved and they're supporting their education, it's amazing the result that can have on kids.

Advantage #6: School Culture. The sixth factor reported by principals as an advantage of reconfiguration as impacting students' success was an improvement in school cultures as evidenced by multiple variables. Exurban Principal 1 reported the climate of his/her intermediate school positively changed. He/She explained the building setting was more developmentally appropriate:

The whole building changed from fun, cute little things you do with kindergarteners to now you have an intermediate building. Some would say [it] is unfortunate because you're losing a lot of those fun things. But it's really more focused on a middle school in a lot of ways. We're developing the student themselves as a person and an individual.

Urban Principal 1 reported an improved workplace climate and culture as evidenced by teacher turnover. He/She stated, "And so being able to see some of the history and the growth of that climate and culture has been valuable for me. And over the last two years, we've had very little teacher turnover." Rural Principal 2 continued this theme of climate improvement at the intermediate school and its effects on improved student peer relationships:

And so now instead of that happening at the middle school level, where kids are really starting to get that, oh my gosh, I'm different and I don't think I can talk to anybody. It's another beautiful thing about it happening at the fourth and fifth grade level. I don't think that kids are quite into that brain development where it's cliquish or they're afraid. They're almost so young still, that they don't know that they should be concerned about that because it's not part of their development just yet. So I think that's been something that we found to be really neat. Some of the friendships and relationships that we see form would not be happening at that middle school level. But they're allowed to still happen at this level.

Urban Principal 2 acknowledged climate and culture changes in his/her school and community led to students feeling more successful. He/She reported students were seeing themselves different developmentally due to the reconfiguration; yet they were still enjoying being elementary students. Urban Principal 2 reported, "I really enjoyed helping kids find their role in a bigger community ... going from a school where kids come to be taken care of to a school where kids contribute to their community, not just in the school."

Advantage #7: Student Behaviors. The seventh factor identified as an advantage to reconfiguration as impacting students' success was decreased student behaviors as measured by office discipline referrals. Urban Principal 2 reported on their data stating, "Because we had some preliminary data that showed the biggest impact that you could visibly see and put your senses on was just the complete drop in student behaviors, especially at the three through five [grades]." Exurban Principal 1 reported similar effects after reconfiguration, "We saw was a dramatic decrease in student behavior."

FACTORS: Disadvantages of Reconfiguration to Narrower Grade Spans

Principals reported three factors as disadvantages of reconfiguration to narrower grade spans with increased school transitions, complicated family routines, and separation of siblings. All six principals reported disadvantages to reconfiguration to narrower grade spans.

Disadvantage #1: School Transitions. The first disadvantage to reconfiguration reported was increased school transitions. Five of the six principals cited the extra transition in a student's school career as a significant disadvantage to reconfiguring the elementary schools in their district. Urban Principal 1 stated, "I would say that transitional year, and creating one more transition is the thing that we have spent the most time on and anticipating that being a negative." Similar transition concerns in this school district were reported by Urban Principal 2:

The only downfall to having a three through five [grades] building or a K through two [grades] building that we've experienced so far are the idea of an extra transition. For kids, we've worked hard to help our kids feel like we still are one community, but it is a different building. So it's a transition ... we had to be really, really mindful about that transition and making not just the kids but our staff that were coming from the other building to feel like they were a part of the community.

Rural Principals 1 and 2 also expressed similar concerns about the additional transition in their district after reconfiguration and the effects on school culture. Rural Principal 1 reported on the loss of a community school for students, "We lose that community feel or that community school, that I can walk to school, or I can get there in two minutes. So, I think that's been a huge piece of that, the transitions." Rural Principal 2 commented on the difficulty in establishing relationships with students in a shorter timeframe due to the extra transition. He/She stated, "I

think anytime that you take and only have your little pumpkins for two years, it takes a little while to get to know them, right? It takes a little while for them to get comfy with you.” The extra transition was especially concerning to Rural Principal 1 and its impact on special education students. He/She explained:

Now as a school system, we just created another transition that they have to try to build new relationships and build that background with you, and that becomes hard. And like I said, for our special ed students, it’s been extremely hard. We host the district wide [special education] program, which is our ASD [Autism Spectrum Disorder] students. So all high-level students for ASD come to my building. And it takes a long time to build that relationship, even just with the parents, not only the students, but the parents too. And we have over the last three years, we’ve seen such a struggle for those students and parents to make that transition.

Disadvantage #2: Family Routines. The second disadvantage of grade level reconfiguration to a narrower grade span reported by three of the six principals was family logistical concerns. Exurban Principal 2 summarized these reports by explaining parents’ concerns with having to pick up students at two separate locations:

You know, if they had a kindergartener and a third grader, for example, we did hear from a few parents . . . we heard more of was at the end of the day picking students up well; now, I got to go to two buildings to pick my kids up. How is that going to work? And so we heard more about the logistical kinds of things in that realm.

Disadvantage #3: Sibling Separation. The third disadvantage to reconfiguration reported by two of the six principals was the separation of siblings at two elementary schools due to

narrower grade spans. Urban Principal 1 stated, “I think for those families that have siblings, it can be a little bit tricky with logistics.” Urban Principal 1 further explained the concerns by parents of young siblings who may only be a chronological year or two apart but separated due to reconfiguration to primary and intermediate schools. These parents reported this separation of siblings would be detrimental to their children’s social and emotional well-being.

Research Question Three

The third research question addressed similarities and differences between geographic classifications of principals’ communities and their reports of rationale for grade level reconfiguration at their schools. In this study, geographic classifications were exurban, urban and rural communities. Exurban, urban and rural schools’ classifications were determined based on population per square mile as measured during the 2010 United States Census (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Student enrollment data by district at the time of reconfiguration was available on the Minnesota Department of Education’s website.

Using principals’ responses in the interviews, the researcher compared the reports of principals for each of the influencers related to reconfiguration. The reported influencers were accountability measures rating schools, community pressure on principals, school culture concerns, school board pressures on principals, student mental health, and family transiency. Utilizing the ‘descriptors function’ in the Dedoose program, geographic classifications of the school district were matched with each principals’ response. Reports of similarities and differences in reconfiguration rationale based on demographic classification will be presented in two sections: (1) Similarities among geographic classification and (2) Differences among geographic classification.

Research question three: *What similarities and differences exist between geographic classification of select Minnesota school principals' communities and rationale for selection of grade level reconfiguration?*

Similarities Among Geographic Classification

Principals from the three geographic classifications reported many similarities in their rationale for grade level reconfiguration. Similarities were examined in the areas of accountability measures rating schools, community pressure on the principal, and school culture concerns.

Principals from all three geographic areas reported the rating of schools due to accountability measures as impacting their decision to reconfigure. Exurban Principal 2 stated:

Actually, there was a lot of conversation around being a quote unquote, testing school, and what kind of difference that would make because when you're Pre[-kindergarten] through five building or configuration of that realm only part of your kids test and part of the kids don't test. And so there isn't this climate of this is what we do. This is important. It's how we know what you've learned.

Urban Principal 1 stated, "And so I think there is a lot of pressure around that one assessment. I don't know in my heart of hearts as an educator, if that's really the best way to look at growth."

Rural Principal 1 reported having a reconfigured school impacted their approach to MCA's, "I think it's really important that we approach it as a school. We're all in this basically together, we need to be rowing in the same direction, helping each other with the variables that pop up. And so we try to take a school approach to how our scores come out."

Principals from all geographic areas reported community pressures influenced the decision to reconfigure elementary schools in their district. Exurban Principal 2 reported:

The MCAs are a very public thing. And so it's a different kind of pressure because it's coming to you from outside, not just from your families, but from your community, from the news media, from the state, from the federal government. And so it's a very public thing. And that can cause a lot of stress and anxiety in people.

Exurban Principal 2 continued, “Unfortunately, as a principal, you’re the face of the building, and whatever goes well or doesn’t go well, is your responsibility. And I’ll never forget, like I said, my first year, when I came in, there was a continuous improvement school.” Urban Principal 2 stated, “I don’t necessarily feel that pressure from our district team. I think the pressure comes from the community.” Rural Principal 2 recognized the community pressure from parents to reconfigure due to inequities in class sizes at elementary schools in the district:

And then we started to consistently see our class sizes, you know, increase in like four or five, there was a large pocket of kiddos that come through. And we’ve got six elementary schools, some are really small, some are medium, and some are large, and the population and needs that we could supply them with their community school, if you will, their neighborhood school, it didn’t always match where the population was booming. And so it made our class sizes across the district in a grade level very different, some class sizes might have been as low as 16 to 19. Others were as high as 34 to 36. And that’s not good practice as a district.

School culture concerns influenced principals from all three geographic areas to consider reconfiguration. Exurban Principal 1 stated, “What it boiled down to was, when kids aren't doing

well, we oftentimes blame students, blame parents, all of those blame game. And it came down to really focusing on not that we weren't doing a good job, but what we were doing wasn't meeting student needs.” Rural Principal 1 reported concerns with the anxiety level of staff due to MCA’s and subsequent impact on school culture, “I think it was more about the management of our staff and trying to figure out what do we do to help them because if a student sees that a teacher is anxious knowing that this is a huge data point, the students get anxious, too.” Urban Principal 1 reported, “There's challenges at some of these schools, and that was one of them, where the culture was just a culture of feeling exhausted and depleted over not meeting test scores and benchmarks and tired and stressed.” Urban Principal 1 reported the decision to reconfigure positively affected the instructional staff and school culture immediately:

It was probably the teachers who pushed us to say, okay, we're doing this. Through our reimagining process, like I said, we had that team that met thought outside the box came up with some ideas, but we really took it back to our schools. And we let our teachers drive a lot of what the next steps were through many different processes of getting their thinking shared in small groups, getting some written feedback, getting some survey feedback and rating scales. But we really let them take it and run with it. And they felt very passionate about this idea of being able to target in and developmental designs, and really focus on the foundations and pre k[indergarten] through two and look at how we give more academic choice, and enrichments, and three through five. And so we really let teacher inspiration kind of take control.

Differences Among Geographic Classification

Principals from the three geographic classifications reported difference in their rationale for grade level reconfiguration that were only present in their respective district. Differences in rationale were examined in the areas of student mental health, school board pressures, and student transiency.

Exurban Principal 1 identified student mental health needs as playing a role in reconfiguring his/her school. As school staff continue to encounter students with varying needs, narrowing the developmental levels addressed by staff was noted. Exurban Principal 1 explained:

I think one of our biggest pressures in in schools right now is addressing the wide range of mental health needs that exist in our communities. And I'm not just going to say with our students, but with our families and our family structures as well. And do I feel more pressure on that even as a pre[-kindergarten] through five [grade] principal than what my fourth graders score on their math MCA? I absolutely feel more pressure around that area because I've got a responsiveness to my community. We also as an education institution have been asked to do things particularly in that arena that none of us had any training for.

The fourth influencer examined by the researcher in interviews with principals was the reported pressure school board members presented to the principals. In the exurban and rural school districts, principals reported pressure from the school board to reconfigure due to population growth and past presence of primary and intermediate school in their respective district.

Exurban Principal 1 reported the housing crisis because of the United States' Great Recession of 2008 complicated the district's need for further building of elementary schools. The exurban school board had expected continued population growth and need for an additional elementary building. This principal reported:

We were growing, they [school board] thought they needed to keep building another elementary school quite possibly after this one opened. And then they were contemplating, I think, like an early childhood kindergarten center. And how do you open [another elementary school] and not have to keep doing all these shifts in your community. They opened [School A], it was a primary building, and the other building became intermediate. And then we had the foreclosure crisis, it hit this area incredibly hard. And there wasn't going to be that need to add another building because of what was happening with growth.

Rural Principal 1 indicated the school board in this district struggled with passing a bond referendum. Due to difficulty with passing a bond to build another elementary school, the school board moved toward reconfiguration to solve overcrowding concerns at specific grade levels.

The exurban school district also had a history of elementary grade level configuration of primary and intermediate schools. School board members were familiar with these configurations. As stated by Exurban Principal 2, "Initially, it [reconfiguration] came from the school board. There had been a long history in that district of having previously been a primary and an intermediate school."

Exurban Principal 1 and 2 both reported their respective school board directed one year of research before reconfiguration. Exurban Principal 2 reported, "And it was a basically a

directive from the school board to at least research what this would look like. And we spent a solid year plus on really doing research on what are the benefits, and what are the downfalls to doing reconfiguration in that model.” When the decision to reconfigure was subsequently made in the exurban district, school board members’ positive recollections of their own children’s experiences was a deciding factor. Regarding school board members seeking reconfiguration due to these positive recollections, Exurban Principal 1 stated “. . . Yeah, what prompted the change? I think nostalgia.”

Urban Principal 1 and 2 reported on the influence of transiency by their student population as effecting their decision to reconfigure. As their two school are in close proximity to each other, many families would move back-and-forth between the two schools due to open enrollment. Urban Principal 1 explained:

We had a lot of family that were in between and saw a lot of students who bounced back and forth. As parents may get frustrated with one school, they would hop to the other than hop back, which we know wasn’t best for kids either.

Urban Principal 2 concluded, “Our attendance wasn’t stable, our enrollment was never stable, lots of turnover, lots of families moving. Of course, that means assessment data was never stable and was declining.”

Chapter Summary

Chapter IV presented the findings of the study. In Chapter IV, the research questions were presented, summary of research methodology was provided, a description of the sample was reviewed, analysis of the data described, and a summary of the findings for each research question. In the summary of the findings, interview responses from six principals were reported

and analyzed regarding the influence of educational policy and accountability measures when choosing to reconfigure grade spans, the effect of grade span reconfiguration on students' success, and similarities and differences between communities when choosing to grade span reconfiguration.

Chapter V: Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

Educational reforms to address the needs of struggling schools have been evident for over 50 years as schools continually address students having limited success under changing programming and initiatives (Heise, 2017; Jennings, 2015; Kantor, 1991; Vinovskis, 1999). Grade span reconfiguration may be utilized to address students' lack of success (Coladarci & Hancock, 2002; Dove et al., 2010; Franklin & Glascock, 1996; Howley, 2002; Paglin & Fager, 1997; Renschler, 2002; Seller, 2004; Wren, 2003). The case study format used in this study allowed for the collection of individual interview responses from the principals' perspectives regarding grade span reconfiguration and student success. This chapter presents the conclusions of the study in relation to the research literature presented in Chapter II.

Chapter V is organized into the following sections: summary of research, conclusions and discussion, limitations of the study, recommendations for practice, recommendations for further research and summary.

Summary of Research

Research Purpose

The purpose of this study is to determine how education reform, standards, and accountability measures has affected select elementary principals' decisions in addressing grade span reconfiguration and the subsequent effects on student success.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

1. What do select Minnesota elementary principals report is the influence of educational policy and accountability measures when choosing to reconfigure grade spans at the school they lead?
2. What do select Minnesota elementary principals report as the factors and effects of grade span reconfiguration on students' success?
3. What similarities and differences exists between geographic classification of select Minnesota school principals' communities and rationale for selection of grade span reconfiguration?

Summary of Research Methodology

Case study was the methodology chosen to examine the research questions of principals' reports on grade span reconfiguration due to accountability measures and assessment of impact on academic achievement. The case study design involved individual interviews of principals who experienced reconfiguration of their elementary schools. Participants in the study were elementary principals in Minnesota whose schools had reconfigured from kindergarten through fifth grade to either primary or intermediate grade span schools between the 2015 through 2019 school years.

Six elementary principals were selected as participants in this study. These six principals were selected through the employment of a criterion sample. Interview questions, aligned to the research questions, were asked of the six principals to gather sufficient data to answer the research questions. Responses to the interview questions were organized by theme with supporting responses from the principals to provide evidence for interpretation.

To address the research question of similarities and differences existing between geographic classification of select Minnesota school principals' communities and rationale for selection of grade span reconfiguration, further criteria was applied to the three school districts represented by their principals in the study. The three school districts represented in the study have differing geographic classifications based on exurban, urban, and rural communities.

The following procedures occurred for analysis of the data. Interviews were completed via Zoom, recorded, and transcribed by the researcher. Data analysis included organizing the data into common themes and categories. Using an inductive process for analysis allowed the researcher to generate themes, display patterns, make comparisons with the literature review and draw conclusions.

Discussion and Conclusions

This study examined elementary grade span reconfiguration through the lens of educational policy and student success. Few studies have been conducted on elementary grade span reconfiguration and student success (Coladarci & Hancock, 2002; Dove et al., 2010; Franklin & Glascock, 1996; Howley, 2002; Paglin & Fager, 1997; Renchler, 2002; Seller, 2004; Wren, 2003). In this study of select Minnesota elementary schools reconfigured between 2015 to 2019, principals were the focus as study participants as they implement policy and interpret the effects of change at the school level. The study's finding did confirm a relationship between grade span reconfiguration and education policy. Further findings in this study illustrated factors impacting decisions to reconfigure elementary schools, highlighted the advantages and disadvantages of reconfiguration, documented the negative impact to school culture due to

annual testing and accountability measures, and delineated more similarities than differences in rationale for reconfiguring when comparing geographic classification of schools.

Research Question One

What do select Minnesota elementary principals report is the influence of educational policy and accountability measures when choosing to reconfigure grade spans at the school they lead? The first research question addressed the continual influence of standards and yearly standardized testing of the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments (MCA).

This study concluded accountability measures due to educational policy was a factor in principals' rationale for reconfiguration of their elementary schools to narrower grade spans. As noted by Wren (2003), "Given the push towards educational accountability, school reform has been feverishly debated . . . [however], grade span configuration and school-to-school transition must be given serious consideration given their obvious impact on student achievement" (p. 11).

During interviews, principals were asked how they have dealt with the demands of accountability measures, what prompted them to make changes to their grade span configuration and, specifically, whether MCA testing had a role in reconfiguration. Four variables were identified as influencing reconfiguration to narrower grade spans as related to education policy. These four influencing variables were rating schools with accountability measures, community pressure to improve test scores, school culture concerns resulting from MCA performance, and school board pressures to improve schools' MCA proficiency.

This study concluded the pressures of yearly assessments did affect the principals' decision on grade span reconfiguration. Findings emerged from the study regarding the demands

of accountability measure and pressure to increase achievement as measured by yearly standardized testing.

Elementary principals in the study stated the Minnesota state academic standards and the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) created proficiency targets unattainable for students in their schools' previous grade span configuration. The challenge to improve student success led principals to consider narrower grade spans at their schools. Principals argued schools with narrower grade span configurations can build a climate of accountability with MCA-tested grade spans exclusively at their schools. Principals also cited accountability measures as an obstruction to other variables effecting students' success. Concerns of school ratings shifting the focus from addressing the social and emotional needs of students to primarily focused on reading and math instruction was reported as problematic for schools.

Corresponding to the pressures of accountability measures, principals reported their community's perception of school failure influenced their rationale for reconfiguration. Principals reflected on the tremendous pressures placed on principals to make changes to schools due to poor MCA results. Principals described the pressures from community as persistent. Expressions of concern were echoed by principals in the study due to the publishing of MCA test results, the considerable analysis by news organizations, and the lack of presentation of student growth as a demonstration of successful schools.

Principals identified school culture as negatively impacted due to accountability measures. Principals reported increased pressure to motivate staff and students due to MCA testing. School climates were described as deflated after MCA test scores were published. Moreover, according to principals, the pressure on school staff to increase MCA test scores was

high as many teachers presumed job loss over poor test results. Principals reported staff perceived test results as a reflection of principals' and teachers' efforts with no regard to outside-of-school variables. This culminated with principals feeling challenged to continually motivate staff to focus on instructional strategies instead of the results of the MCA tests. As expressed by one principal, the punitiveness of federal and state accountability systems negatively impacted the culture and climate of their school. The punitiveness and pressure of this accountability is described by Vinovski (2009), "[President] Bush wanted to close the achievement gap by mandating accountability, high standards, annual academic assessments, and consequences for schools that fail to educate disadvantaged students" (p. 163).

The final variable related to accountability measures influence on principal's decision to reconfigure grade spans was the beliefs of school board members. School board members are affected and respond to education policy. As identified by Dillon and Rotherham (2007), "Under NCLBA, . . . the goal is to ensure that all schools improve their performance over time and have almost all of their students score 'proficient' on state standardized tests by 2014" (p. 1). According to principals, school board members expressed three different rationales for reconfiguring elementary schools in their districts due to NCLBA. While school board members expressed concerns for grade level overcrowding, school board members also held beliefs their district's elementary schools were failing due to low proficiency rates on the MCA and were supportive of change in grade span configuration.

Research Question Two

What do select Minnesota elementary principals report as the factors and effects of grade span reconfiguration on students' success? Findings from this study were in opposition to

earlier studies included in the literature review. These previous studies indicated no significant achievement differences related to grade span configuration (Alspaugh & Harting, 1995) or overwhelmingly endorsed broader grade span configurations as ideal (Alspaugh & Harting, 1995; Howley, 2002; Johnson et al., 2016; Renschler, 2000; Wihry, et al, 1992; Wren, 2003). Principals in this study supported reconfiguration to narrower grade spans to increase student success. Conclusions for this research questions were drawn from advantages and disadvantages identified by the participants and were compared to previous studies.

This study concluded principals identified more advantages to narrow grade spans in increasing student success. In this study, principals identified seven advantages to narrower grade spans: improved instructional strategies, decreased developmental stages, better teacher placement, increased teacher collaboration, increased parent involvement, improved school culture, and decreased student behaviors.

Elementary principals in this study reported improved and focused instructional strategies due to a narrower grade span. In her study of student success and elementary grade span configuration across 232 school, Wren (2003) states, “The results express the same conclusion and that is the longer a student stays in a given school the better the student performs” (p. 10). However, principals in this study reported reconfiguration to narrower grade spans aided in prioritizing literacy in the primary grades, allowed for departmentalization and flexible grouping in the intermediate grades, and increased student voice in all grades.

In this study of reconfiguration of grade spans, elementary principals reported advantages to teacher placement. Due to reconfiguration to narrower grade spans, principals reported teaching staff were placed in either primary or intermediate school buildings based on their

instructional strengths. As a result, departmentalization occurred at the intermediate level and professional development allowed for content area specialization by teachers leading to increased student success. This finding is counter to Harris' (1996) study which concluded self-contained organizational structure allows for more instructional time, and student achievement was found to be significantly higher in some subject areas for students in self-contained settings than for those in departmentalized settings.

Increased parent involvement and support were identified as advantages to reconfiguration to narrower grade span and led to student success according to elementary principals in the study. An earlier study by Craig (2006) reported parent involvement as decreasing when school configuration was narrowed due to increase in school transitions. However, principals in this study reported an increase in parent involvement after reconfiguration in comparison to the previous broader grade span configurations. These principals reported dramatic increases in volunteerism by parents at their child's schools.

As an overall evaluation of grade span configuration, Alspaugh and Harting (1995) concluded "no overall achievement difference association with the grade level organization of the school" (p. 149). However, the principals in this study identified four additional advantages to narrower grade spans in addition to those previously cited. First, teacher collaboration increased as schools reconfigured to narrower grade span configurations. Peer observations between colleagues increased with deeper analysis of state standards occurring. Second, principals reported an improvement in school culture. Staff and students at reconfigured schools were reported to be more engaged with decreased teacher turnover and a renewed commitment to the mission of the school. Third, as a product of improved culture and staff-student relationships,

there was a decrease in student behaviors as measured by office discipline referrals in narrow grade span schools. Fourth, with a narrower band of grade spans, staff had fewer developmental stages to address as they instructed, engaged, and built community in their reconfigured school.

Research Question Three

What similarities and differences exist between geographic classification of select Minnesota school principals' communities and rationale for selection of grade level reconfiguration? The third research question addressed similarities and differences between geographic classifications of communities in the study and their rationale for grade level reconfiguration. Previous studies have not addressed this research question; conclusions will be presented only from this study.

In this study, geographic classification was based on exurban, urban and rural communities. Exurban, urban and rural schools' classifications were determined based on population per square mile as measured during the 2010 United States Census (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Student enrollment data by district at the time of reconfiguration was available on the Minnesota Department of Education's website.

Using principals' responses in the interviews, the researcher compared the reports of principals for each of the influencers impacting reconfiguration. The reported influencers were accountability measures rating schools, community pressure on principals, school culture concerns, and school board pressures on principals. As principals responded to questions during their interview, these themes or "influencers" were established.

The study concluded principals from all three geographic classifications reported more similarities in their rationale for grade level reconfiguration than differences. Principals from all

three geographic areas reported the rating of schools due to accountability measures having affected their decision to reconfigure. Principals reported reconfigured schools with narrower grade spans had increased opportunity to motivate staff to address accountability measures. They further reported having cultivated a more positive school culture in a reconfigured building with narrower grade spans.

Principals from all geographic areas reported community pressures influenced the decision to reconfigure elementary school in their district. As the state reports annual MCA proficiency rates, principals indicated these public reports caused stress and anxiety for staff members. This external pressure was felt by principals from not only families but the community-at-large.

School culture concerns influenced principals from all three geographic areas to consider reconfiguration. Principals reported teachers feeling negatively about their job performance due to poor MCA test results. Increased staff anxiety due to MCA testing negatively impacted school culture which subsequently increased student anxiety. Principals further reported school cultures common for feeling exhaustion, deflated, and stressed. After reconfiguring to narrower grade spans, school culture improved as teachers-initiated changes and felt empowered at their school sites.

This study also concluded principals from the three geographic classifications expressed fewer difference than similarities in their rationale for grade level reconfiguration. Differences in rationale were examined in the areas of student mental health, school board pressures, and student transiency as they related to geographic classification. A principal in the exurban district reported student mental health needs as playing a significant role in reconfiguring grade spans at

his/her school. He/She reported school staff encounter students with varying mental health needs; narrowing the developmental levels of students at their elementary school led staff to feel more competent in addressing the mental health concerns of students. A principal in the exurban district indicated the influence of school board members was significantly instrumental in reconfiguration to narrower grade spans. School board members in this district labeled their schools as “failing” and were in search of initiatives to address the perceived failure. Finally, principals in the urban district reported student transiency as affecting their decision to reconfigure. As their two school are located near each other, many families moved back-and-forth between the two schools prior to reconfiguration. Reconfiguring to narrower grade spans decreased student transiency at the schools in this district.

Limitations of the Study

1. Data provided by the study’s participants are based on their perceptions only.
2. The small sample size may limit the generalizability of the study’s findings to the broader community of other elementary schools.

Recommendations for Practice

The following recommendations to school administrators, district administrators, and policy makers are based on the study findings and conclusions:

1. Policy makers discontinue the use of standardized, once a year accountability measures to rate school proficiency; instead, use measurements of growth throughout the school year.
2. School and district administrators analyze current elementary grade span configuration of their school districts to determine if a narrower grade span

- configuration would better accommodate the student population, improve school climate and culture, and increase students' success.
3. School and district administrators engage parents and community members in the possible planning of reconfiguration of elementary schools to narrower grade spans.
 4. School and district administrators increase the number of same grade level teachers at one building. This leads to more collaboration, targeted professional development, and utilization of teacher leaders.

Recommendations for Further Research

The limitations of this study suggest recommendations for future research. The following recommendations for future research are offered based on the findings and conclusions from this study:

1. This study should be replicated with district level administrators, school board members, and parents.
2. Conduct a quantitative study of the standardized testing prior to and after reconfiguration of elementary schools to determine the impact of grade span reconfiguration on accountability tests as one measure of student success.
3. A case study should be conducted over five years with another small group of elementary schools which have reconfigured their grade spans to measure students' success.
4. Conduct a quantitative study on the effects of accountability measures as a stressor on elementary school principals and their retention in the educational field.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to determine how education reform, standards, and accountability measures has affected select elementary principals' decisions in addressing grade span reconfiguration and the subsequent effects on student success. In reviewing educational policy over the last 60 years, federal legislation has greatly impacted elementary schools (Dillon & Rotherham 2007; McGuinn, 2015; Sunderman et al., 2005; Superine, 2005; Vinovskis, 2009). The finding from this study suggests education policy can affect elementary school principal's decision to reconfigure schools. The majority of current literature concludes broader grade spans at the elementary level has a positive impact on elementary students' success (Alspaugh & Harting, 1995; Howley, 2002; Johnson et al, 2016; Renschler, 2000; Wihry et al, 1992; Wren, 2003). The findings from this study support the opposite conclusion as participants reported more advantages to narrower grade span configurations.

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Appendix A: Consultation Form with Superintendent

EMAIL INVITATION TO SUPERINTENDENTS FOR PERMISSION TO INTERVIEW PRINCIPALS

Dear Superintendent:

I am presently enrolled in the doctoral program in Education Administration and Leadership at St. Cloud State University in pursuit of my Ed.D. One of the requirements of this program is the completion of an action research dissertation.

My research focuses on grade-span reconfigurations at elementary schools, education policy, and students' academic achievement. An elementary school in your district, _____, has recently reconfigured. I am seeking your permission to interview the principal present at time of reconfiguration to discover their perception of why elementary schools are reconfigured and the subsequent impact for students.

Participation is completely voluntary. The identify of your district, school, and principal will be kept confidential and no identifiable information will be asked or reported. The interview is designed to take approximately forty minutes.

I would ask you to seriously consider allowing me to incorporate the valuable input of your elementary school principal. Please contact me via a "reply" to this email to let me know if you are willing to participation of your school principal, _____. If you have any questions or would like to discuss my research topic in further detail, please email me at michael.rivard@isd742.org. I would greatly appreciate it if you would take a moment to reply to this email. Thank you in advance for your cooperation.

Thank you,

Michael Rivard

Appendix B: Principal's Invitation

EMAIL INVITATION TO PRINCIPALS TO PARTICIPATE IN A ONE-TO-ONE INTERVIEW

Dear Colleague:

I am presently enrolled in the doctoral program in Education Administration and Leadership at St. Cloud State University in pursuit of my Ed.D. One of the requirements of this program is the completion of an action research dissertation. The Superintendent of Schools in your district has given me permission to conduct research.

My research focuses on grade-span reconfigurations at elementary schools, education policy, and students' academic achievement. As a school principal of a recently reconfigured school, your expertise, experience and opinions are vital to my research. I am seeking your participation in a one-to-one interview focused mainly on your perception of as a principal on why elementary schools are reconfigured and the subsequent impact for students.

Please be aware that your participation is completely voluntary. Your identity will be kept confidential and no identifiable information will be asked or reported. The interview is designed to take approximately forty minutes. You may withdraw your consent and discontinue participation in the project at any time.

This study involves the online recording of your interview with the researcher. Neither your name nor any other identifying information will be associated with the video recording or the transcript. Only the researcher will be able to view the recordings. The recordings will be transcribed by the researcher and erased once the transcriptions are checked for accuracy by the participant. Neither your name nor any other identifying information (such as your voice or picture) will be used in presentations or in written products resulting from the study.

I would ask you to seriously consider allowing me to incorporate your valuable input into my research. Please contact me via a "reply" to this email to let me know if you are willing to participate in a one-to-one interview. If you have any questions or would like to discuss my research topic in further detail, please email me at michael.rivard@isd742.org. I would greatly appreciate it if you would take a moment to reply to this email. Thank you in advance for your cooperation.

Thank you, Michael Rivard

Appendix C: Email for Principal Interview**EMAIL TO PRINCIPALS FOR INTERVIEW SCHEDULE**

Dear _____,

Thank you for responding to my email inviting you to participate in a one-to-one interview. I have scheduled the following date, time and location for your interview:

Date: _____

Time: _____

Zoom Link: _____

The interview should take approximately 40 minutes.

Please confirm your interview date and time via email so that I can be sure this interview can be fit into your busy schedule.

I appreciate your cooperation and would like to thank you in advance for your participation.

Thank you,

Michael Rivard

Appendix D: Consent Form

CONSENT FORM FOR PRINCIPAL INTERVIEWS

TITLE OF RESEARCH: Education Policy and Grade Level Reconfiguration at the Elementary Level

RESEARCHER: Michael Rivard is a Doctoral Candidate at St. Cloud State University. This study is being conducted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Ed.D. program in Educational Administration and Leadership. This study has been approved by the St. Cloud State University's Institutional Review Board.

Michael Rivard has:

A. Provided me with a detailed explanation of the procedures to be followed in the project, The information discussed is confidential. Mr. Rivard will not use my name or anything that could be used to identify me in his report, and I will not discuss our meeting with anyone. The one-to-one interview will last approximately 40 minutes and I will not be compensated in any way for my participation.

B. Explained the procedures for this project include answering eight questions directly related to the focus of this study outlined in paragraph A above. A transcript of the recording will be provided to the participant to review for accuracy and/or submit clarifications to the researcher.

C. Answered any questions that I have regarding the study.

I understand that:

A. I am participating in an interview as part of a research project for Michael Rivard's doctoral program in Educational Administration and Leadership at St. Cloud State University. I understand that the study focuses on grade-span reconfigurations at elementary schools, education policy, and students' school success.

B. My participation is voluntary, and I may withdraw my consent and discontinue participation in the project at any time. My refusal to participate will not result in any penalty.

C. There are no known risks if I decide to participate in this study. Choosing not to participate in this study will not affect my relationship with St. Cloud State University, the researchers, or the school district in which I am employed.

D. There is no plan to reimburse me for any costs I might incur as a result of participating in this study.

E. There is an expectation of confidentiality regarding the interview. Therefore, I agree not to discuss the interview with anyone.

F. This study involves the online recording of your interview with the researcher. Neither my name nor any other identifying information will be associated with the video recording or the transcript. Only the researcher will be able to view the recordings. The recordings will be transcribed by the researcher and erased once the transcriptions are checked for accuracy and/or clarifications by the participant. Neither my name nor any other identifying information (such as your voice or picture) will be used in presentations or in written products resulting from the study.

G. Participant's confidentiality will be protected by using pre-assigned pseudonyms to remove potentially identifying comments or quotes.

H. If I have any questions about this study or would like to request a summary of findings, please contact either Michael Rivard, Doctoral Candidate, or Dr. John Eller, SCSU Professor/Director of Educational Administration and Leadership. Contact information is listed below.

Michael Rivard: michael.rivard@isd742.org Dr. John Eller: jfeller@stcloudstate.edu

By signing this form, I am allowing the researcher to record me via online platform as part of this research. I also give my consent to be video and audio taped.

I hereby give my consent to be the subject of your research.

Signature

Date

Appendix E: Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol

Name of Interviewer: _____

Date of Interview:

Name of Interviewee:

Setting of Interview:

Other topics discussed:

Other documents, etc., obtained during interview:

Introductions: Greetings

- a. Warm up
- b. Establish relationship and build trust

Explain the nature of the research, purpose, and provide consent form for signing.

Begin interview:

1. How has your school dealt with meeting the demands of accountability measures in the last five years?

Probing:

- a) *What do you see as some of the demands No Child Left Behind previously and the Every Student Succeeds Act currently?*
- b) *Were there any significant events or occasions that you would like to share?*
- () *Why were these important?*

2. How would you describe the pressures of accountability measures (MCA's) in your role as a school administrator in increasing student success?

Probing:

- a) *How do accountability measures impact your professional operations?*
- b) *How do the pressures of the MCA's compare to the other pressures of being a principal?*

3. What prompted you to make the change in grade level configuration in your school?"

4. How did the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments impact the decision for changing grade span configurations at your school?

5. What is the relationship between student success and grade-span configuration?

Please explain.

Probing

- a) *What do the teacher you lead believe is the relationship between student success and grade-span configuration?*
- B) *What changes in student success have you observed or noticed since you'd changed grade level configurations?"*

6. What are the advantages of the grade-span configuration at your school as it relates to student success?

7. Is there anything else you would like to share about student success in your school in relation to grade-span configuration?

8. Do you have any additional comments?

Appendix F: Minnesota Department of Health Guidelines

<https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/schools/socialdistance.pdf>

Limit any nonessential visitors, volunteers, and activities involving external groups or organizations as possible – especially with individuals who are not from the local geographic area (e.g., community, town, city, county).

- Limit nonessential visitors.
- Limit the presence of volunteers for activities.
- Use virtual formats for guest speakers and reading programs.
- For schools, move parent-teacher conferences, 504, and individualized education program (IEP) meetings to phone conferences or a virtual format.
- Do not allow community members access to indoor facilities during the hours a youth program is in progress.

Appendix G: IRB Approval



Completion Date 09-Jul-2020
 Expiration Date 08-Jul-2025
 Record ID 37392692

This is to certify that:

Michael Rivard

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

Basic/Refresher Course - Human Subjects Research (Curriculum Group)
IRB Training for Graduate Students (Course Learner Group)
1 - Basic Course (Stage)

Not valid for renewal of certification through CME. Do not use for TransCelerate mutual recognition (see Completion Report).

Under requirements set by:

St. Cloud State University



Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify/?wf2606c60-2611-4fab-8728-68857d7d83fe-37392692

COLLABORATIVE INSTITUTIONAL TRAINING INITIATIVE (CITI PROGRAM)

COMPLETION REPORT - PART 1 OF 2 COURSEWORK REQUIREMENTS*

* NOTE: Scores on this Requirements Report reflect quiz completions at the time all requirements for the course were met. See list below for details. See separate Transcript Report for more recent quiz scores, including those on optional (supplemental) course elements.

- Name: Michael Rivard (ID: 9238988)
- Institution Affiliation: St. Cloud State University (ID: 1328)
- Institution Email: merivard@go.stcloudstate.edu
- Phone: 3202241522
- Curriculum Group: Basic/Refresher Course - Human Subjects Research
- Course Learner Group: IRB Training for Graduate Students
- Stage: Stage 1 - Basic Course
- Record ID: 37392692
- Completion Date: 09-Jul-2020
- Expiration Date: 08-Jul-2025
- Minimum Passing: 70
- Reported Score*: 94

REQUIRED AND ELECTIVE MODULES ONLY	DATE COMPLETED	SCORE
Belmont Report and Its Principles (ID: 1127)	09-Jul-2020	3/3 (100%)
Students In Research (ID: 1321)	09-Jul-2020	4/5 (80%)
Informed Consent - SBE (ID: 504)	09-Jul-2020	5/5 (100%)
Research In Public Elementary and Secondary Schools - SBE (ID: 508)	09-Jul-2020	5/5 (100%)

For this Report to be valid, the learner identified above must have had a valid affiliation with the CITI Program subscribing Institution identified above or have been a paid Independent Learner.

Verify at: www.citiprogram.org/verify/7x8c8e7f7-0670-469c-80e9-89905c248520-37392692

Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI Program)

Email: support@citiprogram.org

Phone: 888-529-5929

Web: <https://www.citiprogram.org>

COLLABORATIVE INSTITUTIONAL TRAINING INITIATIVE (CITI PROGRAM)
COMPLETION REPORT - PART 2 OF 2
COURSEWORK TRANSCRIPT**

** NOTE: Scores on this Transcript Report reflect the most current quiz completions, including quizzes on optional (supplemental) elements of the course. See list below for details. See separate Requirements Report for the reported scores at the time all requirements for the course were met.

- **Name:** Michael Rivard (ID: 9238988)
- **Institution Affiliation:** St. Cloud State University (ID: 1328)
- **Institution Email:** merivard@go.stcloudstate.edu
- **Phone:** 3202241522

- **Curriculum Group:** Basic/Refresher Course - Human Subjects Research
- **Course Learner Group:** IRB Training for Graduate Students
- **Stage:** Stage 1 - Basic Course

- **Record ID:** 37392692
- **Report Date:** 09-Jul-2020
- **Current Score**:** 94

REQUIRED, ELECTIVE, AND SUPPLEMENTAL MODULES	MOST RECENT	SCORE
Students In Research (ID: 1321)	09-Jul-2020	4/5 (80%)
Belmont Report and Its Principles (ID: 1127)	09-Jul-2020	3/3 (100%)
Informed Consent - SBE (ID: 504)	09-Jul-2020	5/5 (100%)
Research in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools - SBE (ID: 508)	09-Jul-2020	5/5 (100%)

For this Report to be valid, the learner identified above must have had a valid affiliation with the CITI Program subscribing institution identified above or have been a paid Independent Learner.

Verify at: www.citi-program.org/verify/7x8c6ef7f7-0670-469c-80e9-89905c248520-37392692

Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI Program)
 Email: support@citi-program.org
 Phone: 888-529-5929
 Web: <https://www.citi-program.org>