THE INFLUENCE OF EDUCATIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY POLICY: AN EXAMINATION OF THE PERCEPTIONS OF EDUCATORS AND STUDENTS ABOUT TEACHING AND LEARNING IN AN URBAN HIGH SCHOOL IDENTIFIED FOR IMPROVEMENT

A Dissertation by

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MA, Wichita State University, 1993
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Submitted to the College of Education
and to the faculty of the Graduate School of
Wichita State University
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education

May 2008
THE INFLUENCE OF EDUCATIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY POLICY: AN EXAMINATION OF THE PERCEPTIONS OF EDUCATORS AND STUDENTS ABOUT TEACHING AND LEARNING IN AN URBAN HIGH SCHOOL IDENTIFIED FOR IMPROVEMENT

I have examined the final copy of this dissertation for form and content, and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership.

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DEDICATION

To all who endeavor to continually learn,

To my family whom I’m sure wondered what happened to me over the past two years as I continued on my unending journey of learning, Raymond F. Gross, Mary Gross, Raymond R. Gross, Donna Gross, Donna Gross Palfrey—your understanding, encouragement, and support have been invaluable,

Two women who are only with me in spirit deserve mention because of their enduring support and inspiration, Norma Jean Neumann Gross, and Elizabeth Gross,

Additionally, my dog Hogan truly served as this woman’s best friend – always present to listen and never uttering a discouraging word
The best thing for being sad,” replied Merlyn … “is to learn something. That is the only thing that never fails. You may grow old and trembling in your anatomies, you may lie awake at night listening to the disorder of your views, … you may see the world around you devastated by evil lunatics, or know your honor trampled in the sewers of baser minds. There is only one thing for it then—to learn. Learn why the world wags and what wags it. That is the only thing which the mind can never exhaust, never alienate, never be tortured by, never fear or distrust, and never dream of regretting. Learning is the thing for you.

-T.H. White,

*The Once and Future King*
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The process of preparing a research proposal, conducting the study, and writing the dissertation opened opportunities to examine my own values, beliefs, and attitudes about teaching and learning. I have come to know many educational leaders in diverse settings: colleges and universities, public and private schools, and professional organizations, large and small, and urban and rural—all learning communities. Simon Bailey, in his book, *Release Your Brilliance*, suggests that everyone possesses talents and abilities that render the individual brilliant. He then uses a metaphor of a brilliandeer polishing and cutting the raw materials of Earth to create a radiant diamond as its brilliance is released. This is how I view the many individuals who assisted me in my continuous journey of learning—they are all brilliandeers.

First and foremost I would like to thank Dr. Jean Patterson, my advisor and mentor. Her guidance, patience, wisdom, and support will forever influence the way that I think and how I act upon my thinking. I also want to thank the members of my committee: Dr. Mara Alagic, Dr. Raymond Calabrese, Dr. Deborah Perbeck, and Dr. Randy Turk for the time, energy, and various perspectives that they brought to my journey. Special thanks go to Mara for lending her expertise about teaching from a global perspective, to Ray for his questions that pushed me to think about thinking, to Deb who (whether she realizes it or not) serves as a role model and mentor, and to Randy for his continued eye toward leadership for change and the future.

I want to acknowledge Dr. Ian Gibson as that special person who first recognized the value I had for such a high level of learning and growth—the WSU doctoral program in educational leadership. Thank you for the vote of confidence and recognition of my potential.
For the collaborative times we shared and support provided, I owe thanks to lucky number, Cohort 13; Danielle Hollas, Crystal Hummel, Bill Kelly, Charlene Laramore, Erica Nance, and Jan Petersen. A special thanks goes to Jan for the many intellectual and not so intellectual conversations we had, and more importantly the friendship that developed and will endure for years to come. Additionally, I want to thank Danielle who has been a friend, cheerleader, and comrade in this process of learning and in our job-alike professional lives.

I am indebted to the Haysville School District USD 261 School Board, and Superintendent Dr. John Burke for their belief in and commitment to my learning. Not once over the past four years when my I was taken away from my office did they question or comment on my absence. I can’t thank them enough for their understanding that professional learning is the foundation for continued learning and growth of the organization.

A tremendous amount of gratitude goes to “River City Public Schools” and the faculty, staff, and students of “Riverside High School” who openly welcomed my study of their perceptions of teaching and learning under the influence of accountability. A special thanks goes to Lori Doyle, Carole Baker, and Barbara Handstedt; staff members who helped to organize my visits and interviews at “Riverside High.” These ladies are truly committed to improving teaching and learning.

Last but not least, I want to mention the Chelsea’s Bar and Grill group, Dr. Glyn Rimmington, Dr. Mara Alagic, and Dr. Jean Patterson for sharing their global perspectives, conversations, and wisdom. Each has broadened my thoughts and has generated a curiosity that will likely compel me to continue to explore, question, and analyze the world around me.
ABSTRACT

The federal No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) expanded the federal role in American education, and by doing so altered the distribution of power among the federal government, states, and local districts. This latest federal education policy includes an accountability component that requires states to administer tests and emphasizes student achievement by a single, objective, standardized assessment. Consequently, students, teachers, principals, schools and even districts are judged as failing or successful based upon a single measure. Studies indicate urban schools of high poverty are more likely to be identified for improvement due to their failure to meet the benchmarks established under NCLB and its measures of adequate yearly progress. Using a conceptual framework of bureaucratic school culture, this case study examines the influence of federal and state accountability policy on the perceptions of educators and students about effective teaching and learning in one urban high school identified for improvement. Findings reveal an overarching conclusion that an established bureaucratic school culture is perpetuated by accountability policy, serving as a barrier to implementation of perceived effective teaching practices that are believed to produce improved student learning.
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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

In the United States, federal and state governments have increased their control of public education through policy enactment (Marshall & Gerstl-Pepin, 2005; North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, 2002; Peterson & West, 2003; Sirotnik, 2004). The latest federal education policy, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) includes an accountability component that requires states to administer tests and emphasizes student achievement as measured by a single, objective, standardized test (Costigan, 2002; No Child Left Behind Act, 2002; Rex & Nelson, 2004). Because NCLB represents an unprecedented level of federal involvement in public education (Marshall & Gerstl-Pepin, 2005), it is important to understand how the federal law and state interpretation of it affects administrators, faculty and staff, and students. I conducted a qualitative case study that examines the perceptions of one urban high school’s principals, certified teachers and support staff, and students as they understand and implement federal and state education accountability policy while they go about the business of teaching and learning.

The Research Problem

Urban high school educators’ work, now more than ever, is influenced by federal and state policy, and students’ school experiences are influenced by educators’ work. Moreover, teaching and learning typically occur in an organizational context influenced by principles of scientific management (developed for industry in the early 1900s by Frederick Taylor) and Max Weber’s theory of bureaucracy (Clark, 1985; Darling-Hammond, 2004; Foster, 1986; Tyack & Cuban, 1995). These early principles of management laid the foundation for many educational practices that have been and continue to be passed on to generations of students.
These organizing principles also represent at least a portion of the education organizational culture as articulated by Schein (2004). It is within a bureaucratically organized educational context that educators and students are managing the mandates of federal and state accountability policies. These policy and bureaucratic requirements are often contrary to educators’ and students’ perceptions about teaching and learning. This is especially true when organizational reform or change in practice is espoused as necessary (Fuhrman, Clune, & Elmore, 1988; Phelps & Addonizio, 2006; Siegel, 2004). The espoused change is part of the adaptation process to meet the needs of each student and in particular those who have been left behind in the past (Hershberg, 2005).

On the one hand, an argument can be made that schools benefit from establishing protocols of what to teach, how to teach, how to organize classes of students, and specifying duties of each educator and principal. These protocols provide a structure intended to provide equitable educational opportunities for all students and to level the playing field in the competitive market created under NCLB (Hursh, 2007). Measurement and evaluation of the processes then allow for diagnosing of specific problems and identifying prescriptions or remedies for change (Darling-Hammond, 2004; Morgan, 1997; Senge et al., 2000).

On the other hand, a case can also be made that federal and state accountability policies have narrowly defined the curriculum with the result that students are becoming expert test-takers rather than critical-thinkers (Dantley, 2003; Hall, 2005; Jernigan, 2004; Resnick, 2002). Critics of NCLB have argued that with so much importance placed on increasing test scores, the ability to think critically, to work as a team member, and to use technology are not being emphasized in the learning experience (Childress, 2006; Hemmings, 2004; Noddings, 2006). Bureaucratic and scientific management organizing
principles encourage and promote compliance, which further undermines the development of critical thinking skills (Callahan, 1962; Johnson, 1984; Larson & Ovando, 2001).

With federal and state policy creating a structured guide with punitive consequences for noncompliance, the depth of influence that NCLB has on the practices of educators and the experiences of students in an urban high school that is already perceived as low performing is just now emerging. While some educators and the public in general recognize the advances made in multi-tiered interventions to support each student (and especially “at-risk students) (Manning, 2005), there is some indication that feelings of despair, confusion, or frustration exist for educators and their students (frustration that the system has not changed to accommodate the suggested interventions) (Goertz & Duffy, 2003) and are illustrated in multiple schools and classrooms across the United States (Fusarelli, 2004; Kozol, 2005; Louis, Febey, & Schroeder, 2005; Murillo & Flores, 2002). As NCLB approached reauthorization in 2007 with no resolution and debate about its future continuing, it is important to understand the impact of federal and state education policy on teaching and learning—stories that are not revealed in standardized assessment scores alone.

Significance of the Study

There are at least three significant contributions this study can make to theory and practice. First, it will contribute to the literature and research on organization theory in the context of an education institution (Fischer, 1984; Knights & Willmott, 1987; Mayo, 1933; Rothschild, 1984; Smith, 1984). Research shows that schools historically modeled themselves around the principles of scientific management and bureaucratic tenets as a way to spur improved quality of educational practice. This study will show that not much has changed. When schools are challenged to meet the demands of federal and state
accountability policy they tend to revert to structure and script where curriculum and instruction is aligned to a test (Johnson, 1984; National Association of Secondary School Principals, 2002; Sheldon & Biddle, 1998).

Second, as teachers describe how federal and state policy have influenced their values, beliefs, and attitudes; a potential exists for education policy reform. The results of this study are important for the fact that educators’ and students’ stories reveal more than mere statistics. Underlying issues with policy implementation and achievement of NCLB’s lofty goals are evident through interviews and discussion among principals, teachers and students. The experiences related by educators and students will contribute to other data collected by various task force groups and commissions (U.S. Department of Education’s No Child Left Behind Summit, 2006; National Conference of State Legislatures, 2006; Council of Chief State School Officers, 2006; National Staff Development Council’s Task Force on NCLB, 2006; and Hoover Institute’s Koret Task Force, 2006) in preparation of the reauthorization of NCLB.

Third, this research has the potential to influence teacher and principal preparation programs. As teachers and principals are faced with reconciling their own perceptions about teaching and learning with policy demands; it is important for those who prepare teachers and school leaders for the education profession to understand the broader issues with which teachers and principals wrestle. Foster (1986) argues that it is inadequate to continue to operate schools, which are a major socializing institution in the U.S, as a bureaucratic and scientifically managed system.
Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to describe the influence of federal and state education accountability policies on the perceptions of educators and students about instruction and learning in an urban high school that has been identified for improvement. One aim of this research is to gather stories that illustrate the teaching and learning experiences of educators and students as they attempt to understand and implement federal and state law within the structures and processes of an educational organization. The shared experiences of educators and students will serve to determine if, in fact, there is a conflict between individual values, beliefs, and attitudes; and the requests of educators and students made by policy. Understanding any conflict that exists may inform further education policy development. The following research questions will guide the study in order that my purpose may be attained:

1. How do educators of one Kansas urban high school identified for improvement describe the influence of state and federal accountability policy on their perceptions about effective teaching and learning?

2. How do students of one Kansas urban high school identified for improvement describe the influence of state and federal accountability policy on their perceptions about teaching and learning?

My research and the questions to which I sought answers were in part determined through my own values, beliefs, and attitudes about effective teaching and learning that have been influenced through personal and professional experience with interpretation and implementation of federal and state accountability policy. The following section reveals my conceptual framework where I have integrated my own experiences with theory and research.
Conceptual Framework

I conceptualize my research as three interwoven beliefs and assumptions based upon my own experiences and the reviewed literature about the interpretation and implementation of federal and state education policy that emphasizes accountability through testing. First, based upon the measures set forth in federal and state accountability policy, I believe many high schools are unfairly perceived as failing, despite such successes as retention of students and growth patterns on achievement tests (Koretz, 2002; Meier & Wood, 2004; Murillo & Flores, 2002; Popham, 2004). Second, I believe that teachers struggle to teach for learning while meeting the demands of policy; namely the accountability measures that place the aims of education on narrowly defined curriculum of reading and mathematics, which is often at odds with teachers’ and students’ perceptions in regard to effective instruction and learning (Darling-Hammond, 2004; Firestone & Mayrowetz, 2000; Greene, Winters, & Forster, 2004; Kohn, 2004). Third, I believe that past practice has established an unquestioned school structure and culture steeped in bureaucratic and scientific management (Foster, 1986; Howley & Howley, 2007; Tyack & Cuban, 1995). NCLB dovetails with these management structures while espousing to be different. The conflict between reality and rhetoric create a sense of confusion for educators and students about effective teaching and learning (Fullan, 2003; Senge et al., 1999).

Each of these beliefs is influenced by the others and culminates in an overarching postulate that teaching and learning are contested when educators’ and students’ perceptions, and policy requirements come together in a bureaucratic culture and context. In this study, I use theories of organizational structure and culture as tools to frame the discussion about the
effects of federal accountability policy on educators’ and students’ perceptions about
effective teaching and learning in a large urban high school.

Theoretical Framework

Theories of organizational structure (Borgatti, 1996; Clark, 1985; Taylor, 1998; Walton, 2005) and culture (Fischer & Sirianni, 1984; Hatch, 1997; Schein, 2004; Van Der Westhuizen, Mosoge, Swanepoel, & Coetsee, 2005; Weick, 2001) are used to interpret educators’ and students’ descriptions of their values, beliefs, and attitudes while teaching and learning in an educational setting where there is enormous pressure to increase student achievement as measured through test scores. This framework is further offered as a way to explain the educators’ and students’ views on federal and state education accountability policy.

Organization Theory

Many contemporary scholars of organization theory agree there is no single overarching truth about organizations. In fact, there are multiple perspectives regarding specific archetypes within various strands of organization theory that are further delineated through contextual perspectives (Clark, 1985; Hatch, 1997; Mills & Tancred, 1992). Further, an organization may be defined as a social structure, a technology, a culture, a physical structure, or as a part of the environment. Still further, an organization may be studied in terms of central issues and recurring themes of organizing, including control, conflict, decision making, power and politics, and change (Foster, 1986; Morgan, 1997; Weick, 2001). For purposes of this study, however, I focus on organization theories in which schools are viewed as socially constructed bureaucracies (Clark, 1985; Ferguson, 1985) with deeply engrained cultural practices (Schein, 2004) that reflect Weber’s tenets of bureaucracy and
Taylor’s scientific management organizing principles. Current federal and state education policies that emphasize accountability as measured through performance on standardized tests also embody principles of scientific management and tenets of bureaucracy (Clark, 1985).

*Scientific Management and Bureaucracy in School Organizations*

The major tenets of scientific management posited by Frederick Taylor are: (a) full exploitation of efficiencies of specialized labor through close supervision, (b) encourage and support efficiency by a piece-rate incentive system whereby pay is based upon the amount of work completed in a specified time, and (c) management defines the tasks that workers perform and determine how to approach these tasks (Taylor, 1998). Educational administrators in the early 20th century embraced scientific management principles and applied them to public education. Doing so shifted control of work tasks from teachers to management (Altenbaugh, 1987; Callahan, 1962; Foster, 1986).

Many of the principles of scientific management converge with the bureaucratic organizational characteristics advanced by Max Weber (Walton, 2005). Even though some differences exist in expectations and operations within a scientifically managed organization and a bureaucratic organization (Morgan, 1997), there are several characteristics of bureaucracy to which Taylor’s principles align: (a) a fixed division of labor, (b) a clearly defined hierarchy of offices, each with its own sphere of competence, (c) those with a higher status in the hierarchy maintain power over those beneath them in the hierarchy, and (d) a set of general rules governing performance of offices (Walton, 2005).

Education researcher Susan Moore Johnson (1984) used similar language to describe the bureaucratic educational organization, which she argues possesses these characteristics:
students are sorted and classified by chronological age and ability, the school day is divided into segments, and subjects are taught separately. Another characteristic is a hierarchy of authority where the principal has authority over teachers, and teachers have power over students. Marshall and Gerstl-Pepin (2005) explain that because the U.S. Constitution does not explicitly give the federal government the right to govern education, by default state policy makers are primarily responsible for education policy. These bureaucratic organizational structures are founded on the rules, regulations, and policies established through the legislative process.

Policy as Part of Organization Structure

Policy is one component of an organization that helps to direct structure and guides function (Foster, 1986; Howley & Howley, 2007; Marshall & Gerstl-Pepin, 2005). Policy can refer to a federal government directive or it can refer to unofficial, nongovernmental, informal, even inadvertent practices that powerfully shape behaviors and outcomes. These policies are not generated from a blank slate; rather they come from decision makers’ definitions of a problem to be solved and are constrained by such realities as time, resources, and a need for action (Marshall & Gerstl-Pepin, 2005). Historically, decision makers have been those individuals in an organization that hold power; whether inherited, bought, or elected (Fischer & Sirianni, 1984). When structure is defined as a framework put together from many different parts, it is easy to see that the individuals with power (the decision makers) determine the “program of actions” adopted by the organization. The program of actions, better recognized as policies, are generally crafted to outline the function of the component parts of the organization (Foster, 1986). The result is an organization whose structure is steeped in operational procedures and power structures and greatly influenced by
the values, beliefs, and attitudes of those in decision making roles at the top of the hierarchy (Silins, Mulford, & Zarins, 2002).

Proponents of the bureaucratic educational organization argue that it provides the necessary structure and consistency to ensure that all students are provided equal educational experiences (Chubb & Moe, 1990; Fischer & Sirianni, 1984; Theobald & Nicholson-Crotty, 2005). Indeed, the language of NCLB promotes a reform effort in public schools to ensure equitable education for all students where each is challenged by rigorous standards and teachers are held accountable for student learning (Irons & Harris, 2007; National Governors Association, 2003). With this major goal of the law, policymakers are suggesting there is a “one best system” that prescribes the what, where, when, and how of schooling. This philosophy of schooling is a vestige of the old scientific management movement (Callahan, 1962; Foster, 1986; Tyack, 1974). Not only is a formula or script suggested for schooling, but measurement and evaluation follow from the assessments as a tool to reveal whether or not students are learning the intended curriculum (Peterson & West, 2003; Sunderman, Kim, & Orfield, 2005).

Policy development, interpretation, and implementation give rise to consideration of the culture of the organization, particularly when the organization of schools have changed little over the last 100 years (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Ingram, Louis, & Schroeder, 2004; Peterson & West, 2003; Sizer, 1992).

Culture of the Organization

Bureaucratic practices and scientific management further represent a great deal of an education organization’s culture as articulated by Schein (2004), who defines culture as:
A pattern of shared basic assumptions that was learned by a group as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems. (p.17)

The essence of a group’s culture is its pattern of shared, basic taken-for-granted assumptions. Schein (2004) suggests that culture manifests itself at the level of observable artifacts and shared espoused beliefs and values, which are undergirded by tacit assumptions. An organization’s culture may be analyzed on these three levels.

At the surface and most visible level of organizational culture are artifacts, which includes all the experiences that one can see, hear, and feel when encountering a new group. Artifacts include a group’s visible products, such as the architecture of its physical environment; its language; its technology; its artistic creations; its style, as embodied in clothing, manners of address, emotional displays, and myths and stories told about the organization; its published lists of values; its observable rituals and ceremonies; and so on. Artifacts also include, for purposes of cultural analysis, the organizational processes by which such behavior is made routine, and structural elements such as charters, constitutions, formal descriptions of how the organization works, and organization charts (Schein, 2004). Schein warns that it can be dangerous to try to infer the deeper assumptions from artifacts alone, because one’s interpretations will inevitably be projections of one’s own feelings and reactions.

The second level of cultural analysis are a group’s espoused values and beliefs (Schein, 2004). When a group is first created or when it faces a new task, issue, or problem, the first solution proposed to deal with it reflects an individual’s own assumptions about what
is right or wrong, what will work or not work. This idea or proposed solution remains an individual’s own belief or value until the group takes joint action and the observed result is something that the organization accepts as valid. When the result of an action is the desired outcome by the group, the original individual value or belief becomes a value or belief of the organization—an accepted practice or basic underlying assumption (Schein, 2002-04, 2004; Weick, 2001).

When a solution to a problem works repeatedly, it comes to be taken for granted. What was once a hypothesis, supported only by a hunch or a value, gradually comes to be treated as a reality. Basic assumptions, in this sense, have become so taken for granted that one finds little variation within a social unit. The degree of consensus results from repeated success in implementing certain beliefs and values. In fact, Schein (2004) says if a basic assumption comes to be strongly held in a group, members will find behavior based on any other premise inconceivable. These basic assumptions tend to be nonconfrontational and nonnegotiable, and hence are extremely difficult to change (Fullan, 2001).

Schein’s (2004) proposed three levels of cultural analysis are used in this study to describe to what extent the school’s artifacts and symbols represent the values of its educators and students, and to articulate the deep assumptions underlying those values as revealed in their interviews. The structure of these levels of cultural analysis will provide a tool to determine the depth of the culture ingrained in the practices of teachers and actions of students. The questions that may be answered are: (1) Do educators and students really believe in NCLB?, (2) Do they really value assessments?, and (3) Is the value espoused or integrated into practice?
Bureaucratic organizational theory, principles of scientific management, and the theory of organizational culture will provide a framework for explaining the influence of state and federal accountability policy on educators’ and students’ perceptions about teaching and learning in one urban high school. A review of the literature on policy and values, beliefs and attitudes of educators and students about teaching and learning in an era of accountability is outlined in the following chapter and provides a beginning framework for discussion of current research and research yet to happen.
CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

The literature review encompasses a number of themes, as it begins with a history of federal policy involvement in education, current federal policy involvement in education, and concludes with empirical research on educators’ and students’ response to accountability systems. This review illustrates how current federal education policy has evolved to its present form and then describes the current policy context. With NCLB’s emphasis on testing and assessment, it is important to understand how federal education policy developed into its current form as a measure of school success or failure, especially when the perceptions of educators and students are influenced by that judgment. The research related to policy and bureaucratic influence on educators’ and students’ perceptions about effective teaching and learning is synthesized and is followed by a summary of the integration of all the literature informing this study.

History of Federal Involvement in Education (1960’s ESEA to NCLB)

Many policies, practices, commissions, and reports have helped to mold and direct operations and establish missions for contemporary public high schools. NCLB may be considered a culmination of several initiatives developed from the diverse fabric of the country and the intended outcomes for its citizenry (Kimmelman, 2006; National Governors Association, 2003). A focus, first on national security that transitioned to equity and equality, and then to quality of education can be demonstrated through a timeline of activities, commissions, and policies; each resulting from the political, economic, and social context of the times.
National Defense Education Act of 1958

Until 1957, education in the United States was the sole responsibility of the states. In fact, there is no mention of education in the U.S. Constitution. However, when the Soviet Union launched the first space satellite, Sputnik, in October of 1957, President Dwight Eisenhower called for increased training in the fields of science and engineering. Congress furthered the concern for gains in mathematics and science when it passed the National Defense Education Act (NDEA) in 1958. National security was used as the basis for the law, but it was premised on the notion that the public education system was to blame for the United States falling behind the Soviet Union. If the NDEA of 1958 established the cornerstone for federal involvement in public education, then the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) built the structure (Kimmelman, 2006).

Elementary and Secondary Education Act – 1965

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act was part of President Lyndon B. Johnson’s war on poverty and Great Society program. The basic purpose of the Act was to provide assistance to children from low-income families and to address equity and equal educational opportunities. Despite increased funding for what were called Chapter programs that provided additional time, instruction, and resources and materials for disadvantaged youth, this group continued to do poorly in school. The battles for equity and equality in education were fought over the next two decades with many educators, policymakers, stakeholders, and researchers providing evidence that the quest continues (Cohen, 2001; Peterson & West, 2003).

Even with the additional resources provided under the guidance of ESEA, the achievement gap failed to close, large numbers of students continued to drop out of high
schools, and students of the U.S. continued to perform below students of other industrialized nations on standardized achievement tests (Institute of Educational Sciences in the U.S. Department of Education, 2003). Therefore, the U.S. Department of Education commissioned a task force, the National Commission on Excellence in Education, to investigate and report on the status of U.S. public education, and high schools in particular, and to provide recommendations for improvement (Karp, 2004; Kimmelman, 2006). In 1983, Secretary of Education Terrell Bell released *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform*.

*A Nation at Risk – 1983*

Similar to what occurred in 1958 with NDEA, education was being blamed for the United States being confronted with serious economic problems. The National Commission on Excellence in Education charged with investigating the quality of education in the U.S. was comprised of representatives from business, higher education, state education agencies, and K-12 practitioners. Two quotes from the opening paragraphs of the report point to the seriousness of concerns that initiated the investigation in the first place. First, “Our society is being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a nation and a people” (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983, p. 5). Followed with, “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” (p. 5).

The report included a number of indicators of the risks confronting the nation if there was no support for the commission’s recommendations. These risks included unfavorable comparisons of U.S. student achievement with their international peers, the large number of adults and 17-year-olds who were functionally illiterate, the declining achievement of high
school students on standardized achievement tests, and the concerns of business and military leaders with regard to the costs for remedial education for students they were hiring. The Commission made these recommendations: (a) increase high school graduation requirements; (b) require schools, colleges, and universities to adopt more rigorous and measurable standards and higher expectations for academic performance and student conduct; (c) devote significantly more time to the learning of the new basics, including consideration of a longer school day and year; (d) improve the preparation of teachers and make teaching more rewarding and respected; and (e) hold elected officials and educators responsible for providing the leadership necessary to achieve the recommendations (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). *A Nation at Risk* spurred many reform efforts, yet a growing tide of uneasiness continued with an ebb and flow of gains and regressions, which in 1989 led to the Governor’s Education Summit.

*Governors’ Education Summit -1989*

 Shortly after he became president in 1988, George H.W. Bush convened all 50 governors, some members of his cabinet, and a few high-level administration officials for an education summit. The 1989 summit, citing the *Nation at Risk* report, took the Commission’s recommendations to another level by promoting national education goals. Of significance is the fact that the federal role in education was continuing to increase, with greater involvement in state and local policies and even suggesting national education goals. The participants of the summit agreed that a task force overseen by the National Governors’ Association would work with the President’s designees to recommend national education goals by 1990, which became commonly known as Goals 2000. The Education Summit was co-chaired by Arkansas Governor William J. Clinton, who was elected president in 1992.
One of Clinton’s agendas featured education, and a hallmark of his administration was the adoption of Goals 2000 into law when ESEA was reauthorized in 1994 (Gordon, 2003; National Association of Secondary School Principals, 2002).

Goals 2000 – 1994

Educate America Act: Goals 2000 contained a number of principles from the 1989 summit convened by President Bush. This federal law reauthorizing ESEA set national goals that called for school readiness; school completion; student academic achievement; leadership in mathematics and science; adult literacy; and safe and drug-free schools. Although most of the goals were topics that historically addressed educational issues regarding student achievement, the list also included safe and drug-free schools, which encompassed much larger societal concerns. Further discussions on implementation were necessary to make something happen, therefore, work was continued with the National Governors Association in a 1996 Education Summit (Kimmelman, 2006; National Association of Secondary School Principals, 2002).

National Education Summit – 1996

Governors from more than 40 states and national business leaders met in March of 1996 to discuss the state of U.S education and progress toward goals established in Goals 2000 legislation. Of significance is the fact that no education organizations were invited to participate. The summit briefing materials addressed a number of issues related to academic standards and accountability, including public and business support for high academic standards and accountability, what other nations were doing in these areas and how the U.S. compared with them, the progress states have made to implement high academic standards,
assessment and accountability, and how technology can be an effective tool to help students and schools reach high academic standards.

These issues delineated trends in education that had been developing since 1989 and emphasized the priorities that business leaders and governors placed on schools to hold educators accountable for change. The governors and business leaders left their summit recommending that state and local education agencies develop clear academic standards and better subject matter content. No longer was U.S. education viewed as separate from distinct states; they were now working within a national paradigm (Gordon, 2003; Kimmelman, 2006).

1999 National Education Summit

The national foothold on education initiatives was strengthening and was evidenced in the 1999 National Education Summit that included 30 governors, business executives, and educators. Three principles served to guide the participants’ discussion: (a) reform begins with a commitment to set the highest academic standards; (b) quality assessments are essential to measure progress against those standards; and (c) implementation of comprehensive systems is required to guarantee full accountability for results, starting with real improvements in student achievement (Achieve, 1999).

Members of the summit made a commitment to improving teacher quality, helping all students achieve to high standards, and strengthening accountability. To improve educator quality, participants agreed to strengthen entrance and exit requirements of teacher education programs; target professional development programs that give teachers the content knowledge and skills to teach to higher standards; and develop competitive salary structures to attract and retain the best qualified teachers and school leaders. To strengthen
accountability, they agreed to work together in the states to create incentives for success and consequences for failure, strengthen the ability of principals and teachers to select their own colleagues and control school budgets, provide students who were at risk of failure with opportunities for extra help, and recognize successful schools and intervene in low-performing schools. The commitments were carried forward to the most far-reaching reform agenda framed in No Child Left Behind (Center on Education Policy, 2006; Peterson & West, 2003; Smith, Desimone, & Ueno, 2005).

No Child Left Behind Act – 2001

One last summit prior to the enactment of the law was held in October of 2001, despite being so soon after the catastrophic events of the September 11 terrorist attacks. The fact that the 2001 National Summit was held shows the commitment the participants had for reforming U.S. education. The catastrophic events of 9/11 reaffirmed that U.S. education was an important part of creating national success in a global environment and its decline was seen as a serious problem for the country. Not long after this summit convened, President George W. Bush and a bipartisan group from Congress met to finalize NCLB—a law that captured the essence of the previous summits (Kimmelman, 2006).

In January 2002, President George W. Bush signed NCLB into law, the most comprehensive federal education law ever written and one that imposed serious sanctions for states and the schools that failed to abide by its provisions. It was clear that the nation’s policymakers were serious about guaranteeing that schools would improve the achievement of their students (Meier & Wood, 2004; Peterson & West, 2003; Sunderman et al., 2005; U. S. Department of Education, 2006c).
In sum, NCLB incorporated many of the concepts that had evolved since the release of the 1983 report *A Nation at Risk*. High academic standards for all students, standardized measures of achievement, and quality teachers and principals were common themes from previous reports and summits that were codified with the enactment of NCLB. However, more than previous iterations of federal education law, NCLB not only places emphasis on accountability, it imposes sanctions for states, districts, and schools failing to meet certain requirements.

*Current Policy Context: No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*

As discussed in the previous section, state and federal policies have evolved over the last half-century, greatly influenced by political, economic, and societal factors. No Child Left Behind, the most recent federal policy, is having an impact on schools through its rules, regulations, and system of rewards and punishments that flow like a river from the halls of Congress to the state legislatures and departments of education, and ultimately finding a pooling spot with the local districts and schools where principals, teachers, and students must figure out the requirements in order to navigate the schooling process (Darling-Hammond, 2004; Kimmelman, 2006; National Research Council & Institute of Medicine, 2004; North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, 2002; Sunderman et al., 2005; Wood, 2004). This section outlines the NCLB law from the federal context, the states’ and local districts’ response, and concludes with Kansas’ compliance.

*Federal Education Policy*

When President George W. Bush and Congressional leaders traveled across the country the day the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 was signed in January of 2002, there was a sense of bipartisan accomplishment on a national agenda. All parties agreed upon a
reform for educational systems perceived to be lagging behind their developed country counterparts. Modeled after the Texas educational reforms implemented under then Governor George Bush, NCLB addresses the achievement gap between racial and ethnic minority students, students of poverty, students with disabilities, English language learners, and their White, middle to upper class peers (Peterson & West, 2003).

NCLB has combined dramatic goals for student achievement with a radical increase in federal control of U.S. schools and a federal mandate for all schools to pursue particular theories of educational reform and market mechanisms to force competition (Chubb & Moe, 1990; Meier & Wood, 2004; Sunderman et al., 2005). These ideas are embedded within the five major pillars of NCLB that call for (1) stronger accountability for results, (2) more freedom for states and communities, (3) highly qualified teachers, (4) proven education methods, and (5) more choice for parents (U. S. Department of Education, 2006b). Each of these five pillars of NCLB is briefly explained in the sections that follow.

**Stronger accountability for results.** Under No Child Left Behind, states are charged with working to close the achievement gap and making sure all students, including those who are disadvantaged, achieve academic proficiency. Annual state and school district report cards inform parents and communities about state and school progress. Schools that do not make progress must provide supplemental services, such as free tutoring or after-school assistance; take corrective actions; and if still not making “adequate yearly progress” (AYP) after five years, make significant changes to the way the school is run (Center on Education Policy, 2006; Meier & Wood, 2004; North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, 2002). AYP is the acronym used for Adequate Yearly Progress as required by No Child Left Behind legislation, and “making AYP” has become a common expression among school personnel.
NCLB has set a target date of 2014, when all students are expected to be proficient in math and reading at their respective grade levels.

*More freedom for states and communities.* Under No Child Left Behind, states and school districts ostensibly have unprecedented flexibility in how they use federal education funds. For example, it is possible for most school districts to transfer up to 50% of the federal formula grant funds they receive under the Improving Teacher Quality State Grants, Educational Technology, Innovative Programs, and Safe and Drug-Free Schools programs to any one of these programs, or to their Title I program, without separate approval (Center on Education Policy, 2006). Teacher Quality State Grants, also known as Title II Part A provides funding to insure that all teachers and principals have opportunities to become “highly qualified” in the content for which they were hired to teach. Educational Technology also known as Title II Part D, provides funding to purchase hardware, software, or training in the use of technology for teaching. Innovative Programs, also known as Title V, was designed as the “catch-all” for funding that might be used for reducing class size, for hiring additional teachers, for extended services promoting greater student engagement, and for resources and materials that could alter curriculum and instruction. Safe and Drug Free Schools, also known as Title IV, funds are designated as an avenue to address the education of students and their families on the affects of drug and alcohol abuse. Title IV also serves as a venue to educate children and the community on how to address school violence.

Flexibility in the use of federal funds allows districts to prioritize their particular needs, such as hiring new teachers, increasing teacher pay, and improving teacher training and professional development (Meier & Wood, 2004; North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, 2002; Peterson & West, 2003; U. S. Department of Education, 2006b).
**Highly qualified teachers.** Minimally, qualifications of teachers include a bachelor’s degree, full state certification, and demonstration of subject-matter competency for each subject taught. NCLB required states to achieve the goal that all teachers of core academic subjects be highly qualified by the end of the 2005-2006 school year. With the passing of this deadline, states are now expected to indicate annual, measurable objectives that each local school district and school must meet in moving toward the highly qualified teacher goal (KSDE, 2007). They are further required to annually report their progress toward achieving the goal of highly qualified teachers in each classroom (Essex, 2006).

**Proven educational methods.** No Child Left Behind puts emphasis on determining which educational programs and practices have been proven effective through rigorous scientific research. Federal funding is targeted to support these programs and teaching methods that work to improve student learning and achievement. In reading, for example, No Child Left Behind supports scientifically based instruction programs in the early grades under the Reading First program and in preschool under the Early Reading First program (National Reading Association, 2003). Approved programs include Success for All, Read 180, and as an early intervention, DaisyQuest (U. S. Department of Education, 2006b).

Although mathematics is the other core component upon which districts and schools are measured for adequate yearly progress, NCLB administrators have not endorsed a full-blown program other than expressing approval for the National Council for Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) national standards. Attainment of grant funds and continued access to support can only occur with the promise to use endorsed programs where training is required for implementation, and the monitoring and evaluation of impact is regularly done (Darling-

More choices for parents. Parents of children in low-performing schools have new options under No Child Left Behind. In schools that do not meet state standards for at least two consecutive years, parents may transfer their children to a better-performing public school, including a public charter school, within their district. The district must provide transportation, using Title I funds if necessary. Students from low-income families in schools that fail to meet state standards for at least three consecutive years are eligible to receive supplemental education services, including tutoring, after-school services, and summer school. Also, students who attend a persistently dangerous school or are the victim of a violent crime while in their school have the option to attend a safe school within their district (Hess & Finn, 2004; Kozol, 2005; Meier & Wood, 2004; North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, 2002; Ravitch, 2000).

Consequences of NCLB: A School District “Identified For Improvement”

NCLB differs from previous reauthorizations of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) by requiring all schools and districts to implement a single statewide accountability system for ensuring equal educational outcomes (No Child Left Behind Act, 2002). Under NCLB, performance on state reading and mathematics tests determines whether schools make adequate yearly progress (AYP). Schools failing to meet these achievement goals for two consecutive years are identified for improvement, and subject to an escalating series of sanctions over time, ranging from mandatory school choice options and supplemental services to school reconstitution and restructuring (Darling-Hammond, 2004; Hess & Finn, 2004; Meier & Wood, 2004).
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 (Fagan, 2006; No Child Left Behind Act, 2002). Schools identified for improvement under NCLB and its AYP accountability component, are generally characterized by a diverse population, that is, they are minority-majority, high poverty, large, urban or inner-city, and lack resources and adequate facilities (Koretz, 2002; National Research Council & Institute of Medicine, 2004). Although guidance and regulations are provided in federal policy, much of the implementation, monitoring, and evaluation is determined through state agencies of education (No Child Left Behind Act, 2002).

States’ Response to Federal Education Policy

Among state elected officials, NCLB did not garner the sustained political support necessary to insure implementation. Early on, the National Conference of State Legislatures opposed the legislation as an unwarranted intrusion on state power, and the nation’s governors raised concerns about the cost of NCLB (Center on Education Policy, 2006). The passage of NCLB in 2001 came with the expectation that appropriations for Title I would continue to grow by significant amounts to offset the increased requirements placed on states. The increase in appropriations for Title I was viewed as a condition under which the goals of the legislation could be realized. Yet NCLB was implemented at a time when state governments faced the biggest decline in state revenues in at least 20 years (Boyd, 2003). In February 2003, the National Governors Association released a policy statement, agreed to by
both Republican and Democratic governors that labeled NCLB an unfunded mandate and called for greater flexibility and additional funding to support it.

As implementation proceeded, dissatisfaction with the law reverberated within statehouses where policy-makers voiced concerns about diminished local control and the growing costs of implementing NCLB. These issues cut across political and ideological lines. Lawmakers, including many who initially had supported the goals of NCLB, have come to see the law as overly punitive and lacking adequate funding (Franklin, 2006; Kim & Sunderman, 2005; Peterson & West, 2003). Moreover, in March 2004, the chief state school officers from 15 states sent Secretary Paige a letter asking for more flexibility in determining which schools were making adequate yearly progress (AYP) (Chief State School Officers, 2004). Kansas, with its large Republican following, and its generally supportive nature of federal law, was not represented in the petitions for more flexibility or exemption from participation of NCLB.

Kansas’ Response to Federal Education Policy

The state of Kansas has placed an emphasis on following the constructs of federal education policy and the guidance passed on to the states. Kansas had and continues to use an accreditation plan that incorporates an accountability system. The concern over NCLB in Kansas is easily noted by the debates and even litigation on the part of state legislators, the Governor, the state board of education members, and local district officials over funding and resources to support the many demands placed upon schools and educators. The focus on accountability through increased testing, although concerning, pales in comparison to Kansans’ frustration with the lack of funding to support all initiatives, including the mandated testing (Kansas State Department of Education, 2003, 2004). Despite the lack of
resources, many Kansas schools and districts have students who score well on state assessments and even outperform over half of the other states on nationally-normed assessments such as the ACT and the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) (Kansas State Department of Education, 2005a).

NCLB requires each state to establish curriculum standards and assessments that provide a measure of student progress toward achieving standards in reading, math, and eventually science (Irons & Harris, 2007). Since 1991, Kansas has had in place a school improvement process called Quality Performance Accreditation (QPA), which requires each school to address quality criteria in these areas: (a) create and implement a school improvement plan that includes a “results-based” staff development plan; (b) establish an external assistance team; (c) establish locally determined assessments: (d) provide formal training for teachers in the curriculum standards and state assessments; (e) assure staff are licensed and fully certified; (f) inform and communicate with the local board of education school plans of improvement; (g) assure that local policies are in alignment with state policies; (h) establish local graduation requirements that meet the minimum state requirements; and (i) assure opportunities or access to programs and services that support student learning (K-12). Additionally, each school must meet performance criteria, which are student performance on state assessments, attendance and graduation rates, and participation in the state assessment process (Kansas State Department of Education, 2005b).

As part of the accreditation process Kansas schools have always been required to administer state assessments in reading, writing, mathematics, science, and social studies. The first state assessments administered under QPA qualify as low stakes tests. Low stakes tests are described by Firestone and Mayrowetz (2000), in their fieldwork inside and outside
the U.S., as assessment without sanctions or much pressure to improve results. In order to comply with federal policy and use an accreditation process that had some of the federal policy components already in place, KSDE altered the QPA process to increase the testing and reporting of all students’ scores, and set AYP targets toward the NCLB goal of all students reaching proficiency by 2014 (Kansas State Department of Education, 2005b). This increase in testing and the required reports has raised the level of concern among educators. Beginning in 2003, the stakes were changed to meet the demand for a single accountability system. This single accountability system meant possible sanctions such as loss of federal funds, prescribed instructional programs, personnel reassignment, school choice for students, and possible restructuring (North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, 2002).

Although Kansas had a system in place and adjusted it to comply with NCLB, a number of schools and districts are finding it difficult to support and assist all student subgroups to demonstrate growth at the rate expected (Kansas State Department of Education, 2005a, 2005c). Of particular concern are those districts and schools with high populations of racial and ethnic minorities, students of poverty and special needs students that require multiple reports for each subgroup (Noguera, 2004). The new standards constitute a significant increase in the academic expectations that students are required to meet. Although some states have adopted relatively low standards (Fusarelli, 2004), the Kansas standards are rigorous and demanding, and not surprisingly a growing number of schools and districts are struggling with the challenge to meet them (Kansas State Department of Education, 2005a). As the pressures mount to increase student achievement, educators’ practice and students’ educational experience are influenced. Studies referenced in
the following section reveal a glimpse of values, beliefs, and attitudes of educators and students about teaching and learning.

*Empirical Literature on Educators’ and Students’ Values, Beliefs, and Attitudes Toward Teaching and Learning in an Era of Accountability*

The interactive components of a bureaucratic organization, the theoretical perspectives of organizational theory and organization culture, and the literature on education policy evolution and NCLB served as a foundation to guide my search of the empirical literature of educators’ and students’ values, beliefs, and attitudes toward teaching and learning. Understanding that the purpose of this literature review is to identify, and synthesize the related research associated with my proposed study (Glatthorn, 1998), a couple of questions helped to generate my search:

1. How do educators perceive teaching and learning under state and federal mandates for accountability and high stakes testing?
2. How are students’ thoughts and actions about teaching learning influenced by state and federal mandates for accountability and high stakes testing?

In order to gather information from previous studies, I initiated my search with key terms and phrases from the research problem identified earlier in this proposal as well as the two questions just stated. These terms and phrases include teaching and learning, reform, high schools, organization theory, bureaucracy, organizational culture, accountability and high-stakes tests and assessments, education policy, and NCLB. Although I was able to identify a number of empirical studies referencing educators’ values, beliefs, and attitudes about teaching and learning in an era of accountability, limited student perspectives in this context have been researched. I also clarify that although I did find a number of empirical
studies citing educators’ values, beliefs, and attitudes; most studies represented teachers’ perspectives. What I did find specifically related to the principal perspective draws on anecdotal experiences with teaching and learning in this era of accountability (Craig, 2004; Sunderman, Orfield, & Kim, 2006). Careful attention was given to the quality of the research. I limited the research literature to those articles found in peer-reviewed journals and those that provided a well-defined methodology including explanations of the research design, the methods of data collection, sampling techniques, and data analysis. Two categories were used in the search of empirical studies. These categories are addressed in each of the following sections; first I discuss findings from studies of educators’ perceptions of federal and state accountability policy on their practice, and second I discuss the components of federal and state accountability policy that influence the students’ education experience.

The research revealed two primary themes referring to educators’ experience in an era of mandated testing. One theme is the perceived benefits of accountability policies. A second theme is related to unintended consequences of accountability policies, and included teaching to the test, increased pressures and its effects on teachers’ morale and motivation, and lack of qualified educators in urban schools.

Embracing Accountability Policies – Realized Benefits

Whether research completed is through survey methods or case study narratives, on the west coast or the east coast, in elementary or secondary schools; the overwhelming consensus is that educators believe accountability is important and that it has guided their efforts to improve learning opportunities for all students (Abrams, Pedulla, & Madaus, 2003; Louis et al., 2005; Rose & Gallup, 2006; Tracey, 2005). Consistent findings from the
research suggest that accountability processes have forced educators to review and analyze each student’s academic progress in order to design strategies for each learner’s needs. It is no longer possible to ignore students who in the past were possibly excluded or marginalized, that is, special needs students, English language learners, and the at-risk student (Braun, 2004; Louis et al., 2005; Nichols, Glass, & Berliner, 2005; Sunderman et al., 2005).

Summarized by Tracey (2005) in his work with Sunderman, Kim, and Orfield (2005) who conducted the survey “No Child Left Behind: The Teachers’ Voice,” educators from Richmond, Virginia and Fresno, California expressed the belief that strong educational reform plans are necessary, and that educators and schools should be held accountable, within reason, for achieving progress regardless of the problems they face. Abrams, Pedulla, and Madaus (2003) found educators nationwide, in high-stakes environments as well as those in a low-stakes testing environment, agreeable (60 to 97 percent of the respondents) to accountability under certain conditions: (a) it is inappropriate to use test results to award school accreditation; (b) it is inappropriate to use test results to evaluate teachers/administrators; (c) it is inappropriate to use test results to award teachers/administrators financial bonuses; and (d) it is inappropriate to use test results to promote or retain students in a grade.

Even though many teachers agree with accountability, they would like to have more control in determining educational plans for individual students (based upon their needs and abilities) and selection of material to teach the standards required of them (Rex & Nelson, 2004). The idea of accountability is generally accepted, but educators in a multi-site case study conducted by Louis, et al (2005) believe it is being pushed too far. These educators expressed that accountability is being used in counterproductive ways that narrow the
curriculum and unfairly burdens schools serving very poorly prepared students without requiring any changes in conditions that make some schools unequal (Louis et al., 2005).

**Unintended Consequences of Accountability Policies**

Although educators support accountability, they also identified a number of unintended consequences that they attributed to accountability policies. For example, in their study of educators’ voices concerning NCLB, Sunderman and colleagues (2005) found teachers and officials of the high schools and districts feeling disenfranchised. Ingram, et al. (2004) drew similar conclusions in their longitudinal study, in which high school teachers across the country claimed that their academic freedom had been violated and that accountability data was not used to guide instructional decisions. These teachers were frustrated that they were not allowed to tap into their knowledge and skill to teach the whole child, and worried that critical thinking was not developed in their students because of an emphasis to teach to a test (Ingram et al., 2004). The most obvious result of such surveys as the National Board on Educational Testing and Public Policy (2003) draws attention to a concern that the focus on testing leads to instruction that contradicts educators’ views of sound instructional practice (Abrams et al., 2003). Empirical studies revealed evidence of teachers experiencing an internal conflict between what they believe is good teaching and complying with policies that narrowly define test results as the sole measure of success (Firestone & Mayrowetz, 2000; Rex & Nelson, 2004). Although some educators find comfort in a pre-determined curriculum, method, and mode of operation as suggested by the accountability system of NCLB (Finn, 1993; Sunderman et al., 2005), they also believe the rewards and punishments associated with state and federal policies create undue pressures and demands that force them to go against their values, beliefs, and attitudes, which in turn
negatively impacts teaching and learning, stifles democratic discussions, and reinforces stereotypes particularly where disadvantaged and minority children are concerned (Madaus & Clarke, 2001; Natriello & Pallas, 2001).

**Narrowing Curriculum, Scripted Lessons, and Teaching to the Test**

In addition to overall frustration with accountability policies, teachers also reported concerns about narrowing the curriculum, having to follow scripted lessons that required little thinking or creativity, and feeling pressured to teach to the test. In a study of the “Texas Miracle,” Haney (2000) reported that students, especially those identified as “at-risk” were assigned to test preparation classes for the Texas Assessments of Academic Skills (TAAS). In this same study teachers indicated that much of their time in course instruction was outlined for them to insure that standards and objectives were covered. Haney’s (2000) research was further supported by Ingram and colleagues (2004) where teachers of multiple states reported that the pressure to raise test scores prompted them to emphasize instructional and assessment strategies that mirrored the content and format of the state test (Ingram et al., 2004). The pressure for students to perform well on tests also encouraged teachers to devote large amounts of classroom time to test preparation activities, particularly those focused on reading and mathematics (Abrams et al., 2003; Louis et al., 2005; Smith et al., 2005). A case study conducted by Goodson and Foote (2001) found educators in a non-traditional high school fighting to retain school accreditation and funding by reducing their creative and project-based activities in order to find time to drill and practice students for assessments.

Summarized from nationwide surveys of educators in Virginia, Kentucky, Arizona, and North Carolina by Abrams and her colleagues, (2005) kindergarten through high school teachers indicated that (a) they greatly increased the amount of class time spent on instruction
in tested areas (43% of the respondents); (b) they created classroom tests in the same format as the state-mandated test (51%); and (c) state testing programs have led them to teach in ways that contradict notions of good instructional practice (76%). These findings suggest that teachers believe that curriculum and instruction is narrowly defined by state standards and tests while learning is determined by test results.

The narrowly defined curriculum and scripted lessons directly aligned with assessments have many educators beginning to wonder what the tests reveal about student learning (Amrein & Berliner, 2002; Firestone & Mayrowetz, 2000; Nichols et al., 2005).

Consequences of Teaching to the Test

A number of education researchers and scholars have argued that rather than teaching children what they need to know to participate successfully in 21st century society, current education policy has forced educators to become creators of test-takers (Amrein & Berliner, 2002; Nichols et al., 2005; Sheldon & Biddle, 1998). Not only is there a consensus among many educators that teaching to the test is an expectation, but there is evidence that test results have become an accepted measure of learning (Alexander, 2005; Gunzenhauser, 2006; Rose & Gallup, 2006; Siegel, 2004). Even though research points to an ingrained culture of testing to measure learning, evidence from other studies raise questions about the emphasis on test scores as a measure for learning (Braun, 2004; Ciolfalo & Wylie, 2006; Curren, 2004; Koretz, 2002; Shernoff, Csikszentmihalyi, Schneider, & Shernoff, 2003).

Amrein and Berliner (2002) provide evidence from a study of 18 states with high-stakes tests that in all but one analysis, student learning is indeterminate, remains at the same level it was before the policy was implemented, or actually goes down when high-stakes testing policies are instituted. Clear evidence for increased student learning was not found in
the study, and there are numerous reports (Amrein & Berliner, 2002; Carnoy, Loeb, & Smith, 2000; Firestone & Mayrowetz, 2000; Haney, 2000; Nichols et al., 2005; Noddings, 2004) (Nichols, Carnoy, Firestone, Haney) of unintended consequences associated with high-stakes testing policies such as increased drop-out rates, teachers' and schools' cheating on exams, and teachers' defection from the profession.

The Texas study done by Haney (2000) and Carnoy’s (2001) assessment of Texas’ testing program described the inclination of some educators to engage in questionable ethical practices and to manipulate the system in order to paint a positive image of reform efforts while masking the failures of schools to attain adequate levels of achievement. In the early 1990s a variety of evidence led many observers to conclude that the state of Texas had made near miraculous progress in reducing dropouts and increasing achievement as measured by the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS), however, investigators found only 50% of minority students progressing from grade nine to high school graduation—some students were retained in a particular grade in order to prevent them from taking a test required at the next grade level. Additionally, the Texas study found the number of students identified as “in special education” doubled between 1994 and 1998. The scores of students with disabilities were not figured in achievement reports or the graduation rates (Haney, 2000). Education policy that mandates testing and uses results as criteria of success or failure in schools, districts, and even with individual students, produce pressures that negatively affect teachers’ morale and motivation.

Increased Pressure Lowers Teachers’ Morale and Motivation

Educators are under increasing pressure to produce results on standardized assessments in order that AYP measures are attained while sanctions are avoided. Feelings of
despair, confusion, or frustration on the part of educators and their students are illustrated in studies of multiple schools and classroom across the United States (Louis et al., 2005; Murillo & Flores, 2002). Even those teachers who follow their convictions—teaching for learning in ways that are meaningful and engaging to students—are skeptical as to whether they can do so in a manner that their students will demonstrate proficiency on mandated state assessments (Casas, 2003; Rex & Nelson, 2004; Sheldon & Biddle, 1998).

According to the research, pressure to produce improved student performance is felt by educators from both external and internal sources, and educator morale and motivation are consequently influenced through the expected and actual results of mandated assessments (Peterson, 2005; Sunderman et al., 2006; Tracey, 2005). Survey results from Sunderman et al. indicate 57% of teachers feel pressures come from the district administration to raise test scores on state assessments. Forty-one percent reported feeling pressured by the building principal to raise test scores. Forty-one percent also reported that the increased emphasis on raising scores on state-mandated tests left little time to teach anything not on the test. Seventy percent of teachers felt pressured to prepare students for the mandated tests throughout the year, 63% felt pressured to use test preparation materials developed commercially or by the state, and 85% of teachers surveyed reported feeling pressured to teach test taking skills to prepare students (Abrams et al., 2003; Amrein & Berliner, 2002).

Not only is pressure evidenced in the surveys referenced earlier, but pressure to implement federal and state mandates often manifest as confusion because of mixed messages or lack of information passed on from one level of the educational organization to the next (Louis et al., 2005; Oakes, Franke, Quartz, & Rogers, 2002; Rex & Nelson, 2004). A multi-site case study of high school teachers understanding and implementation of state
accountability policy conducted by Louis and her colleagues (2005) points to frustration on the part of teachers and administrators resulting from top down directives. Educators in the study stated that even their superintendent was on the same side of the fence as the teachers—dissatisfied with state proposals that lacked clarification.

The lowered morale and motivation of teachers is further evidenced through the number of educators reporting the desire to transfer out of tested grades or out of low-performing schools. As many as 40% of the educators interviewed or surveyed indicated they had taken steps to seek employment elsewhere (Abrams et al., 2003; Oakes et al., 2002). Additionally, Goodson (2001) found that educators were frustrated with the pressures to teach to standards that were not clearly articulated or explained through professional development. A bigger concern indicated in the research was the perception that students are under intense pressure to perform well on the state exams while teachers struggle to find ways to help them (as many as 80% of the educator respondents to surveys) (Abrams et al., 2003; Rose & Gallup, 2006).

Pressures associated with high stakes testing policies are especially problematic in urban settings. In their study of teachers in urban settings, Oakes and her colleagues (2002) found that many leave the profession or the urban setting through attrition as well as dissatisfaction with constraints in facilitating learning when the gains for students of a school in need of improvement are far greater than in schools that meet the AYP targets (Oakes et al., 2002).

The themes found in the empirical research on educators values, beliefs, and attitudes about teaching and learning, as influenced by federal and state education accountability policy, illustrate mounting pressures and conflicting views. State and federal policy outlines a
course of action to follow. When the criteria for success or failure is dependent upon student performance on mandated state assessments, educators feel pressured to focus their efforts on “teaching to the test,” often at the expense of non-tested courses or curriculum that may be the most engaging or relevant material for some students (Darling-Hammond, 2003).

Empirical research on the influence of state and federal education accountability policies toward educators’ views about their practice is fairly well documented, however, because NCLB is in its infancy many more studies are evolving or yet to occur. One view on the influence of state and federal policy over teaching and learning is almost nonexistent—the students.

*Empirical Studies That Include Student Perceptions of Teaching and Learning and Accountability Policies*

The student role has often been overlooked in the educational change literature. However, Corbett and Wilson (1993) have argued that the student role is a critical linchpin between adult reform behavior and student success, and that failing to acknowledge and accept this connection is a potentially fatal flaw in promoting understanding of reform and in creating effective change initiatives. Much of the research inclusive of student viewpoints is done in the narrative or case study domain using ethnography to organize and present examples of students’ experience with school (Fine, 1986; Hemmings, 2004; Knight, 2003; Sherwood, 2004). The empirical research that included high school students’ voices primarily focused on the navigation process of school. In these studies, high school students are most concerned with what it takes to pass courses that will take them to graduation and then provide opportunities for further education or gainful employment (Fine, 1986; Hemmings, 2004; Knight, 2003; Koretz, 2002; Rose & Gallup, 2006; Wood, 2004).
Hemmings (2004) found a racially, ethnically, and economically diverse group of graduating seniors who espoused the beliefs of hard work and education as an important factor for future success. This same group of students also admitted they were enrolled in college-bound courses because they believed college was needed to make something of one’s life. Although some of the students were focused and found their courses meaningful and engaging, more than half described enduring monotonous lectures and tests for which they crammed in order to play the system. Those that simply could not tolerate the process, eventually disengaged, choosing instead to focus on “real life.”

The urban setting for case studies of Latino and African American high school students, indicated the same appreciation for education as a “way out” of often times depressed conditions in which they lived (Fine, 1986; Knight, 2003). Yet, school with its many structures and routines was difficult for many of these young people, who were observed struggling to get through classes that provided no relevance to their complicated lives.

A recent dissertation (Sherwood, 2004) conducted in south central Kansas examined struggling high school students’ thoughts about school improvement, and reflects similar experiences that students across the country have expressed about their learning experiences. Each of the three students in Sherwood’s study had little success in a comprehensive traditional high school and thus found themselves in an alternative high school. Each of the students attributed their lack of success in the traditional setting to their frustration with a system in which application of rules and procedures by individual teachers and staff appeared inconsistent and sporadic. They viewed much of the curriculum and instructional practices as irrelevant, uninteresting, and delivered in a monotonous, uncaring manner. In contrast, the
success that students attained in the alternative setting was attributed to a more flexible structure where educators helped students make a connection between the curriculum and the students’ future.

Students accept the structures and functions that have been established over time in the bureaucratic organization. Some manage to navigate the system or do what is required to get to college, some disengage because they can’t find the relevancy of the curriculum in their complex lives, and some are forced out or drop out on their own (Deschenes, Cuban, & Tyack, 2001; Hemmings, 2004). The actions of students and their teachers can be directly tied to the culture in which they live and the culture of the educational organization (Costigan, 2002; Croninger & Lee, 2001).

This review of literature illustrates the increased involvement of the federal government in determining the day-to-day operations of local schools. Increased implementation of federal and state education policies, and suggested reforms appear to perpetuate bureaucratic structures and many scientific management principles. Acceptance of these practices has led some educators and students to begin wrestling with the melding of their own values, beliefs, and attitudes about effective teaching and learning. Of particular concern is the emphasis placed upon state assessments as the sole measure of success or failure of school districts, schools, and even the educators and students. Because NCLB is in its infancy (many schools and districts fully implemented all components in 2005), its depth of influence on teaching and learning may not yet be known. In the following chapter I will outline the research design and methodology that will allow for further examination of urban educators’ and students’ values, beliefs, and attitudes about effective teaching and learning in a high school identified for improvement.
CHAPTER 3

Research Design and Methodology

The development of a research design for this study began with a review of the research questions for which I sought answers. I considered the context of federal and state policy that influences all educators as they go about their daily routines and additionally wonder about the influences of such policy and the consequent actions of educators for the student experience with teaching and learning in a high stakes accountability environment. The policy context in which schools are constantly surrounded has influenced my theoretical framework from which I approached the research. These points of reference acted as a guide as I sought to find appropriate and accurate ways to describe the perceptions of educators and students about effective teaching and learning as influenced by federal and state accountability policies. The methodology outlined in this chapter presents my research perspective and my position and role as a researcher, a review of the research questions, the research orientation, context of the study, and then proceeds with a description of the prospective participants. Additionally, I describe methods for data collection and discuss the data analysis procedures that ensured trustworthiness for the study.

Research Perspective

Selection of a research perspective began with a consideration of the nature of my inquiry and the identification of the type of data needed to be collected to thoroughly answer the research questions (Patton, 2002). The theories of bureaucratic organization and organizational culture framed the interpretation of the study while I conducted an analysis that examined the phenomenon of state and federal education policy interpretation and implementation on the part of educators and students in one urban high school identified for
improvement. Knowledge constructed through the contextual experiences indicated a qualitative case study, the foundation of which is a constructionist epistemology.

The Researcher

The purpose of qualitative research is to describe and understand phenomena, is oriented toward interpretation, and acknowledges a distinction between knowledge discovered and knowledge constructed (Stake, 1995). Epistemological assumptions regarding the foundations of truth and knowledge represent the distinction between knowledge discovered and knowledge constructed. Rather than approaching the nature of knowledge as existing in an external, complete structure or absolute truth described by Lincoln & Guba (1985) as established facts or laws, I operated from a constructionist paradigm in which the nature of knowledge was viewed as comprised of individual reconstructions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This distinction is important because it defines my position and role as a researcher.

My role as the researcher addressed several capacities necessary to conduct this study and report results. First, I acted as investigator pursuing information leading to a greater understanding of the participants’ perceptions about effective teaching and learning in a school identified for improvement under NCLB sanctions. Second, I acted as an observer, taking in all that I was able to see, hear, and experience regarding teaching and learning in the urban high school study site, which enabled me to learn from first-hand experience. And finally, I served as an analyst and interpreter when I reviewed the data and synthesized it in order to communicate as accurately as possible the lived experiences of the participants in a meaningful and useful way.
My personal experiences and involvement with the topic of this study was something of which I was constantly cognizant. The relationship of researcher subjectivity to the many steps and decisions surfacing about the research process necessitated reflective practice in order that a sense of self or identity was known and incorporated with understanding and not confused with it (Peshkin, 2000).

I am a former math instructor of middle school and high school students where I worked with diverse populations in terms of ethnicity, socio-economics, and various levels of knowledge and skills. After 15 enriching years of classroom experience, I crossed the threshold of administration when I became principal of an alternative high school. The three years I spent working with “at-risk” high school students and their teachers is probably one of the most rewarding experiences I will ever have. I attribute the rewarding experience to the almost-immediate growth and success that students demonstrated based upon their own efforts and guidance from the staff.

For the past ten years, I have toiled in district level public school administration where my duties and responsibilities have revolved around development of curriculum and instruction, development of and administration of assessments, development of professional growth opportunities, implementing and monitoring school improvement and accreditation processes, and managing state and federal programs. The school district for which I work is one that was identified for improvement three years ago as a result of our failure to meet the AYP benchmarks established by state and federal accountability policy. The pressure to comply is enormous and I know first-hand from my interactions with the teaching staff of my district that the quickest and easiest route for noticeable improvement is to focus on standards and teach to the test. It was necessary in my role of researcher to examine, acknowledge,
articulate, and consider the potential presence of bias or subjectivity generated by prior professional experiences (Patton, 2002; Peshkin, 2000).

Like Peshkin (2000), it was my goal to be forthright, ethical, and professional with my personal feelings and opinions about the individuals and situations from whom I learned. I have already identified myself as a district level public school administrator; some might call me a bureaucrat aspiring to study the effects of federal accountability policies on educators and students. Joel Spring (2000) explains that in earlier times, bureaucrats were viewed as a means of protecting the public good from corrupt politicians and special interests—they are supposed to be public servants. One of the first decisions or steps involved in the research process is the selection of a research orientation that was compatible with my goals and my constructivist approach. A qualitative case study offered the opportunity for in-depth, rich investigation that provided answers to the research questions posed (Crotty, 2003; Merriam, 1998).

Research questions used to guide the direction of the study, assisted in focusing the methods used for inquiry (Calabrese, 2006). The questions I used in my study were:

1. How do educators of one Kansas urban high school identified for improvement describe the influence of state and federal accountability policy on their perceptions about effective teaching and learning?

2. How do students of one Kansas urban high school identified for improvement describe the influence of state and federal accountability policy on their perceptions about effective teaching and learning?
Research Design: Qualitative Case Study

Case study research provides a detailed description of a particular situation, individual, or event, and is conducted so that specific issues and problems of practice can be identified and explained (Glatthorn, 1998; Merriam, 2001). Stake (1995) described case studies as offering a vehicle through which researchers are able to explore a program, event, activity, process, or one or more individuals, bounded in time and activity.

Different typologies of case study exist and are characterized by the different purposes they serve. My study was best suited to what Merriam (1998) calls a particularistic and descriptive qualitative case study. Particularistic means the case focuses on a particular situation, event, program, or phenomenon while descriptive means that the end product of a case study is a rich, “thick” description of the phenomenon under study.

The design of this study allowed for examination of the experiences of specific individuals in specific school settings while participating in specified activities. This research orientation offered opportunities for deep data collection and a forum for research questions and interview protocols that could be addressed in-depth by the voices of participants most immediately concerned with the situation being investigated in the setting in which it naturally occurred (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992).

Context of the Study: The Largest City and School District in Kansas

Housed in the geographic center of the U. S., the River City community is considered the largest city in the state of Kansas. The metropolitan area is comprised of not only the city itself, but includes the sprawl of the surrounding suburbs and is home to 584,671 citizens. According to census report data for the River City metropolitan area, the demographics break down as follows: a) 76% White/Caucasian; b) 9% Black/African American; c) 9% Hispanic;
d) 3% Asian; e) 2% Multi-Ethnic; and f) 1% American Indian or Alaskan Native (U. S. Census Bureau, 2000).

This metropolitan city is home to the largest school system in the state of Kansas, Unified School District 007, River City Public Schools. The school district is comprised of 11 high schools, 17 middle schools, and 57 elementary schools. Seven of the district’s 11 high schools are traditional, comprehensive high schools and three are alternative high schools that provide a smaller learning environment for students, while the remaining high school is maintained as a magnet school offering an intensive focus on visual arts, science, and law (USD 259 Website, 2006).

Although the River City metropolitan area is 75% White, the district student population is only 45% White, and is far more culturally and racially diverse than the community as a whole. The demographic breakdown from the latest district report card of 2006 shows growing diversity as well as an increasingly depressed economic situation. From 2004-05 to 2005-06 demographic shifts in district enrollment indicate a decrease in African American students from 24.4% to 21.46%, with an increase in the Hispanic student population from 20.1% to 21.08% Students who fell into the “Other” category remained somewhat stable at 12.04%. Further noted is the slight increase in the number of Limited English Proficient (LEP) students in the district – up to 11.87% in 2005-06 from 10% in 2004-05. Students with Disabilities (SPED) revealed an insignificant change from 15% in 2004-05 to 14.56% in 2005-06 (KSDE, 2007).

When a district has been identified for improvement, one of the requirements (sanctions) and processes established in federal and state policy is the development of a district plan of improvement (Kansas State Department of Education, 2005b). Included in the
district’s 2006-07 plan of improvement were strategies to improve the performance of high school students (USD 259 District Plan of Improvement, 2006). Not only were strategies identified, but support and training for teachers were developed as a way to demonstrate the district had “highly qualified” teachers who could address the needs of students. Explained in the district plan of improvement was the designation of staff development plans whereby teachers were required to participate in such strategic training sessions about instructional strategies (2006).

Each high school was not only expected to address the concerns identified for improvement within the district’s overall plan, but they were required to identify and address particular concerns with the students of each school. Each school was required as part of the federal and state policy to report on student performance measures of AYP (Kansas State Department of Education, 2005b). Each school presented a unique set of circumstances.

Study Site: Home of the River City, Riverside High School Pioneers

This study took place in the spring of 2007 at Riverside High School, which is one of the district’s seven comprehensive senior high schools. River City, Riverside High School employed 100 teachers and support staff, 5 administrators, and served a student population of 1329. Seventy-two percent of the school’s students were considered low socioeconomic status. During the 2005-06 school year, Whites comprised 55.76% of the student population; African Americans represented 20.69%; and Hispanics comprised 16.85% of the students. Six percent of the students were classified as Other. Nineteen percent of the students were identified with a disability and qualified for special education services. Less than 1% of the students were considered English Language Learners (USD 259 Website, 2006).
River City, Riverside High School reported test scores below the AYP established benchmarks and therefore has been identified as a school for improvement (Kansas State Department of Education, 2005a). Riverside High School (RHS) had earned a reputation as the lowest performing comprehensive high school in the city. Like the district, the school attempted to address its specific needs through targeted goals and strategies outlined in a campus improvement plan that aligned with district-wide programs and interventions to improve students’ performance on state reading and mathematics assessments.

_Purposive Selection_

Participants were purposively selected which is consistent with the qualitative tradition. Creswell (2003) states, “The idea behind qualitative research is to purposefully select participants, sites, documents, or visual material that will best help the researcher understand the problem and the research questions” (p. 185). I selected those stakeholders who were most knowledgeable about the efforts to understand and implement accountability policy while pursuing effective teaching that results in student learning. Selecting participants in this manner assisted in the collection of rich, descriptive data that allowed me to analyze the culture of the school as influenced by accountability policy. I then examined the data to determine how principals, leadership team members, teachers, and students perceive effective teaching and learning under the influence of accountability policy.

Fifty-four Riverside High School stakeholders participated in the study, either in a focus group, an individual interview, or both. The flexible nature of the research design left open the possibility that more or fewer participants could have been needed and data collection was suspended when I reached the point of redundancy (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To assist in the selection of participants, I
administered a brief questionnaire (Appendix A) to, and presented a brief overview of my proposed study to the RHS staff in order to acquire information regarding the criteria below. The questionnaire was provided to the staff in late March when the principal arranged for me to make a brief presentation to the staff outlining the purpose and process of the research study. Additionally, this meeting provided the opportunity for prospective participants to share any information of significance related to the study, especially as it related to potential student participants.

Because of the volunteer nature of the participant selection and the possibility that potential participants could be reluctant or unaware of the contributions they might make to the study, I employed a chain or network sampling technique. This technique involves asking each participant or group of participants to refer other potential participants (Patton, 2002). Merriam (1998) and Patton (2002) both explain the network sampling technique as a way of asking participants to refer the researcher to others who have information or experiences that may add to the depth of the study. For example, high school students will name other high school students who exemplify the characteristics of interest in the study.

Access to the Site and Participants

The selected site was an urban high school – part of a large urban district identified for improvement. The district is not my district of employment, but one in which I previously worked. Permission to conduct my research at River City, Riverside High School was sought and approved through a protocol of submissions to the River City Research and Development Director: consisting of a request to conduct a study, letter of permission from the building principal (including the site and nature of the study as well as who will be doing the study and determined purpose), and notice to the Assistant Superintendent for High Schools. As a
matter of ethical behavior, I agreed to provide information and knowledge of my study to the research and development director, the assistant superintendent for high schools, the director of the learning services division, and the building principal and her staff. Part of my initial agreement with the principal included the development of a schedule for interviews with staff and students as well as observations in classrooms that illicit little use of their personal time, but also was not intruding on instructional time. That schedule was developed collaboratively with the building principal and other members of the school’s Leadership Team.

**Data Collection Methods**

Collection of qualitative data is most often done through verbal means, making it possible for the rich descriptive data necessary to develop the knowledge and understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (Patton, 2002). Data collection methods I used for this study allowed for the accumulation of rich, descriptive data focused on the research questions. Methods included the use of focus groups, semi-structured individual interviews, document review and observations. Each of these methods is discussed below.

**Focus Groups**

Focus groups are group interviews designed to facilitate conversation among the participants. Focus groups usually consist of 7 to 10 participants and are useful for generating discussion from a variety of viewpoints (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). Patton (2002) addresses the dynamic that occurs during a focus group interaction:

Focus group interviewing was developed in recognition that many consumer decisions are made in a social context, often growing out of discussions with other people. The twist is that, unlike a series of one-on-one interviews, in a focus group participants get to hear each other’s responses and to make additional comments
beyond their own original responses as they hear what other people have to say.

However, participants need not agree with each other or reach any kind of consensus (pp. 385-6).

The focus group setting allowed me to collect data from a variety of participants most knowledgeable about the context of accountability and its influence on effective teaching and learning. Focus groups were conducted with groups of students, teachers, and administrators.

To balance representation of students among grade levels and the five academies, I conducted four student focus group interviews. A total of 21 students participated in a focus group. All student focus groups were conducted during the last week in April and the first week in May 2007.

My intent was to have focus groups comprised of students from the same career academy, but due to obligations, the focus groups were comprised of students representing two or three different academies, other than the Freshman Success Academy. The Freshman Success Academy focus group consisted of 6 students—3 male and 3 female students, 3 were Black and 3 were White. The second student focus group consisted of 6 students from the Engineering and Manufacturing Academy, Healthcare Academy, or Fine Arts Academy—3 male and 3 female students, 4 were White, 1 Hispanic, and 1 Vietnamese. The third focus group consisted of 6 students from either the Business and Hospitality Academy or Healthcare Academy—3 male and 3 female students, 4 were White and 2 were Black. The fourth student focus group consisted of 3 students representing the Fine Arts Academy and Business and Hospitality Academy—1 male and 2 female students, 1 was White and 2 were Black. Of the 21 students participating in one of the four focus groups, 15 were identified for free or reduced school lunch, and 10 of the students struggled academically to earn passing
grades in all courses and had difficulty in achieving proficiency as measured through standardized assessments. The combinations of students allowed me to gain an understanding of the students’ perceptions of effective teaching and learning under accountability regulations from a cross section of each academy, from a diverse group of students, and from a representative group of economically disadvantaged as well as a group of students struggling with academics while also hearing from those excelling in the core academic content. Focus group questions for students can be found in Appendix B.

To learn the perspective of teachers, I conducted four teacher focus group interviews. A total of 20 teachers participated in one of the groups. All four focus group interviews were conducted in April 2007. Each teacher focus group was comprised of teachers from one of the career-focused academies and although the intent was to have a representative from each of the core academic areas and someone from an elective field as well as a special education teacher, the volunteer nature of the study, did not produce balanced representation as intended. The Healthcare Academy teacher focus group consisted of 8 teachers—5 females and 3 males, 7 of the 8 tenured, and all White. The curricular areas represented in this group were social studies, physical education, English, math, science, and special education. The Fine Arts Academy teacher focus group consisted of 3 teachers—2 females and 1 male, 2 of the 3 tenured, and all White. The curricular areas represented in this group were social studies, journalism/English, and vocal music. The Engineering and Manufacturing Academy teacher focus group consisted of 4 teachers—4 males, 3 of the 4 tenured, 3 White and 1 Hispanic. The curricular areas represented in this group were science, JROTC, math, and English. The Business and Hospitality Academy teacher focus group consisted of 5 teachers—5 females, 3 White, 1 American Indian, and 1 Black. The curricular areas
represented in this group were family and consumer science, business, English, math, and special education. All of the teachers involved in focus group interviews taught students of various grade levels, sophomores to seniors. (Freshman teachers’ perspectives were garnered through additional interviews and observations.) The configuration of each group and in total enabled me to gather perceptions of teachers: from various disciplines, from courses tested and courses not tested, with experience or without inexperience, and from the male and female perspective. Although I did not garner perspectives from a racially diverse population during the teacher focus group sessions, I did account for diversity of the staff when I added additional individual interviews, when I scheduled observations, and when I met with the entire staff during an inservice day in the fall of 2007. Focus group questions for teachers are found in Appendix C.

In early April 2007, I conducted a separate focus group with four of the school’s five administrators. The administrative team was comprised of 1 principal and 4 assistant principals. The focus group assembled consisted of the principal, and three of her assistants. Due to other responsibilities the Freshman Success Academy assistant principal was unavailable for the focus group discussion. (I was able to visit with her informally and then as part of the large group meeting with the entire staff in the fall of 2007.) The principal was a White female in her second year at the helm of Riverside, one assistant was a Black male in his second year at Riverside, another assistant was a Black male in his first year at Riverside, but 10th year in administration, while the other assistant who participated in the focus group was a White male in his first year at Riverside and first year in administration. This group of administrators offered a unique perspective from outside the classroom, but one where they
still felt the influence of accountability policy on effective teaching and student learning. The focus group protocol used with administrators may be found in Appendix D.

**Interviews**

Lincoln and Guba (1985) stated that interviews serve as a “conversation with a purpose.” The interviews were open-ended, semi-structured conversations that allowed me to gain an in-depth understanding of the participant’s attitudes, perceptions and beliefs on the topic (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Patton, 2002). I began each interview with a preliminary set of questions, but allowed for the conversation to proceed in the direction dictated by the interview participants. Doing so allowed me to uncover details the interview participants felt were important (Erlandson et al., 1993; Patton, 2002).

Fifteen Riverside High stakeholders participated in an individual interview. The initial data collection plan called for individual interviews with the principal and assessment coordinator or assistant principal in charge of assessments. It was during initial dialogue with the principal that it became clear that the perspectives of other individuals would be valuable. Interviews with the instructional facilitator and data leader were added. Once observations and focus groups were scheduled and partially conducted, because of scheduling conflicts or the need to add participants for the expertise they offered on accountability policy influence on teaching and learning, additional interviews or conversations were scheduled with teachers and students. Those added were school librarian, the drivers’ ed. teacher/football coach, two freshman academy teachers, a business teacher, a science teacher, and a math teacher, three students completing senior projects, and one freshman student greatly involved in JROTC. All interview participants were asked to share their perceptions of effective teaching and learning in an era of accountability. Participants were able to provide a school-
wide perspective on what was occurring in the classrooms of Riverside High in terms of effective teaching, and student learning as well as indicate the influence of accountability policy on their practice. Individual interview guides can be found in Appendices E and F.

Document Review

The collection and review of documents is a commonly used strategy in qualitative research (Creswell, 2003). So that I might gain a more accurate understanding of context and setting of the study, I reviewed the following documents: school bell schedules and organizational charts, student handbooks outlining policies and procedures, school improvement plans, district improvement plans, the district high school reform plan, building and district report cards, and building and district AYP reports. In addition to providing contextually relevant information, the data from documents was used to verify and advance hypotheses as they emerged during data analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1995). I was specifically interested in the achievement data and reform plans used to address deficiencies and the processes and protocols instituted for implementation. These documents informed the data gather in administrator, teacher, and student interviews and focus groups.

Observations

In order for me to fully understand the actions and perceptions of the study participants and the organizational practices and culture of Riverside, I observed and recorded descriptions of behaviors and interactions of the participants, classroom teaching and learning, and artifacts of the setting (Patton, 2002). I scheduled observations in classrooms during the assessment window—March 29 and then again after much of the state assessment sessions had finished—ending a month later May 5. Observations were scheduled in a freshman world history classroom, a junior level chemistry classroom, a tier 2 algebra
classroom, a freshman English classroom, the library where Learning Lab took place, a sophomore level English classroom, a junior level healthcare classroom, another algebra classroom, a US history classroom, and a home-making classroom. Observations in these classes and informal observations in the hallways, library, cafeteria, and office provided insight for actual effective teaching practice that could be compared to the perceptions shared in interviews. According to Erlandson (1993), “Observation allows the researcher to discovers the here-and-now inner-workings of the environment via the use of the five human senses” (p. 94). The ability to see, hear, or feel first hand, the lived experiences of the study participants, I was better able to understand the context and culture of the setting, as well as triangulate emerging findings (Merriam, 1998).

**Data Analysis**

Merriam (1998) describes data analysis in qualitative research as a mysterious metamorphosis whereby the investigator, with his/her data, applied analytic powers, and emerged butterfly-like with “findings.” Glaser and Strauss (1967) developed a method of data analysis as a means of developing grounded theory that consists of categories, properties, and hypotheses conceptually linked. Because the basic strategy of the constant comparative method is compatible with the inductive, concept-building orientation of qualitative research, the constant comparative method of data analysis has been adopted by many researchers who are not seeking to build substantive theory (Merriam, 1998), and this analysis technique was applied to the data collected for this study.

As data were collected, they were managed using a coding process of responses to questions posed to study participants. Word documents were created that were eventually placed into a database created through FileMaker Pro. Categories such as assessment,
accountability, effective teaching practices, definition of learning, catalysts for learning, and obstacles to effective teaching and learning were determined. A process of patterning for commonality of responses was done, leading to emerging themes for further sorting of the data (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). Findings emerged from the review of the data placed into themes. These findings allowed for discussion and interpretation of the study and possible implications for the future.

Trustworthiness

All research is concerned with producing valid and reliable knowledge in an ethical matter. Being able to trust research results is especially important to professionals in applied fields, such as education, in which practitioners intervene in people’s lives (Merriam, 1998).

Trustworthiness of the data was handled through four constructs of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Interviews were recorded and transcribed for verification of facts. Member checks occurred during and prior to the conclusion of the interviews to ensure common understanding of what transpired. An independent reader periodically provided a detached perspective of my writing and data collected to insure that I did not allow my biases to cloud my analysis of the data.

Credibility was enhanced through member checks and the triangulation of data when multiple collection methods were used. Use of focus groups, individual interviews, and observations provided three data points that revealed consistencies or inconsistencies. I also employed a fourth data point in that I was afforded access to several documents (building report cards, school improvement plans, and district improvement plans) that explained or validated some of the dialogue that took place during interviews. I was also afforded the opportunity to return to the study site three months after collection of data to visit with the
entire staff about the information and data I had partially analyzed. This large group meeting provided another version of member checking, while at the same time allowing for additional interpretations about what data I had already amassed.

Transferability, also known as, external validity is left to the reader or audience’s discretion. The reader makes his/her own interpretation based upon the descriptive data, the typicality or modal category, or multi-site design (Yin, 2003). I have made no claims of generalizations. I have described the study site and context while explaining who the participants of the study are. It is left to the reader to determine whether or not comparisons can be made to other settings and situations.

Dependability or reliability was strengthened through data collection protocols and a well-documented audit trail. Dependability was attained through validation of the triangulation of data through various data collection methods including the data generated from the semi-structured interviews of individuals and focus groups, the digital recordings, observations, and documents.

To strengthen, the process even further, confirmability was ensured as I kept documentation of all visits and conversations, much like an audit trail, exactly what occurred throughout the study. Additionally, the data and findings were presented to the participants, faculty and staff of Riverside, administration of Riverside and River City Schools for confirmability of the data. I also sought feedback from a peer reviewer.

Protection of Human Subjects

To insure the protection of human subjects, the Institutional Review Board of Wichita State University approved the proposed study before I began. Each study participant was required to sign a consent form prior to data collection sessions. The consent form explained
the purpose of the research study, asked for voluntary participation, assured that all data will remain confidential, and offered participants the option to withdraw from the study at a later date. All participants under the age of 18 were required to provide their personal assent in addition to written consent from a parent or guardian in order to participate. Adult consent forms, parent consent forms, and student assent forms are located in Appendices G, H and I. To further protect the confidentiality of participants, pseudonyms have been used for the city, the school district, the school, and individual participants in reporting the findings.

It is through the research design of a qualitative case study that I captured the experiences of educators and students in one urban high school identified for improvement under the accountability component of NCLB. The shared experiences of these educators and students were viewed through a lens of bureaucratic theory, principles of scientific management, and analyzed through Schein’s three levels of cultural analysis as a way to respond to my research questions. How have federal and state accountability policies influenced the perceptions of educators and their students about teaching and learning in one urban high school identified for improvement? This is important and timely due to the increasing demands placed upon educators and students and the current discussion and debate regarding reauthorization of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001.
CHAPTER 4

Findings of the Study

Chapter four provides the findings from data collected during this study. Information gathered through document review, observations, and interviews about the community, the school district, and the school and its programs provide insight as to how the study’s participants interpret and implement federal and state accountability policy in an urban high school identified for school improvement under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001. The setting of the school, its history, and the current context—its identification for improvement—are reflected in the values of the schools’ stakeholders, and in turn the values are reflected in the organization’s culture. Therefore I begin this chapter by providing some introductory or background information about the community of River City, River City Unified School District 007, and Riverside High School and its programs. Then, several themes are identified by this study as common to the perceptions of principals, Leadership Team members, teachers, and students about effective teaching and learning in Riverside. The setting, Riverside’s history, the context, and actions of the school’s stakeholders demonstrate a spirit that sets the tone for what is occurring today.

River City USD 007

Unified School District 007 is the largest school district in a Midwestern state, providing services to 48,770 students in grades preK-12. The River City Public Schools educate nearly 11% of all public school students in the state and half of all school-aged children in this south central county. The massive system is comprised of 100 schools. There are 57 elementary schools, 17 middle schools, and seven comprehensive high school attendance areas. Additionally, three alternative high schools provide a smaller learning
environment for youth who struggle in a more traditional setting; while one magnet high school provides intensive focus on visual arts, science, and law; and 15 special schools offer early childhood education, non-traditional learner services, special education, and other services in collaboration with the juvenile justice system. Roughly 66% of all students in the district come from low-income families.

Many of the middle schools and elementary schools falling within the feeder pattern for Riverside High School have high levels of poverty and, like Riverside High School, have been identified for improvement. Schools and or districts who fail to meet the adequate yearly progress (AYP) benchmarks in reading, math, or both for two consecutive years qualify for “in need of improvement” status. The state-determined targets annually increase so that all students must meet the state’s level of proficiency in reading and math by the year 2014. When schools like Riverside or its feeder schools continually fail to meet the benchmarks of AYP, sanctions are leveled such as supplemental services (academic tutoring or instruction provided by outside agencies including for profit agencies), school of choice (parents may choose to enroll children at other schools within the same district that have met the AYP benchmarks), loss of accreditation, and eventually restructuring (change in staff and governing board). Some of the middle schools in the district have reached the point of becoming “schools of choice” in accordance with NCLB and two will undergo restructuring during the 2008-09 school year.

The high mobility rate associated with the level of poverty experienced by a majority of Riverside High School students and the drain on student enrollment caused to a degree by the school choice option at the middle school level, are viewed as challenges for the school, its staff, and the students. These and other challenges are identified in the following
description of the school, bringing to light a spirit of willingness to try something new and to adapt as necessary.

*Demonstrating a Pioneer Spirit: Background and History of Riverside High School*

From the initial ideas presented by the West River City Community Council in 1925 in regard to the development of a new high school located west of the Arkansas River, plans and actions embodied a pioneer spirit. Twenty years elapsed, however, before plans for a vocational-technical school actually materialized. Development of these plans eventually resulted in the construction of an academic school now classified as a comprehensive high school. In September 1953 Riverside High School opened and adopted the Pioneer as its mascot, as it represented the spirit of those going into previously uncharted or unclaimed territory with the purpose of exploring and possibly settling it. When Riverside High opened, it was in the midst of a city thriving as the hub of the nation’s aircraft manufacturing industry. This is an industry that took a hit with the September 11, terrorists’ attacks. As the aircraft manufacturing industry declined, so too did the economy of River City, and the decline was especially felt in the neighborhood surrounding Riverside High School.

In 1953, the one-story, multi-wing building served as a prototype for the later construction of two other River City high schools, one south and the other southeast of the downtown area. The plan at the time was to house each academic/vocational department in a separate wing of the building and was regarded as adequate for the long-range needs of the community. However, the population grew so rapidly that by the third year of operation it was necessary to add 25 classrooms. By 1971 the building was surrounded by 24 portable unit classrooms, many of which were removed as recently as 2005 when construction of
additional science and business classrooms was completed after the passing of a bond issue in 2000 (USD 259 Website, 2006).

Riverside High: Institutional, Invisible, and Inadequate

The physical exterior of the school is constructed of tan glazed brick, which gives it a plain and institutional appearance. The outside of the building is minimally adorned with signs designating the school name and its membership to the River City Unified School District 007. The only indication of any distinguishing character to the building are the dated artistic concrete architectural renderings crafted above or beside the entryways of the wings that once housed specific curricular departments of science, math, language arts, history and geography, fine arts, and vocations.

Riverside High faculty and staff believe the school’s location and institutional character has rendered it invisible. During a discussion with the staff, one teacher noted, “Many of my friends and acquaintances don’t even realize there is a high school south of the highway and west of the river.” Another teacher wondered, “When the school was first built, why wasn’t the main entrance situated so that it faced the river (east)? Many more residents of the city would come into contact and notice the school from that vantage point.”

When invisibility is combined with the school’s location in an impoverished neighborhood and inadequate facilities for athletics and other extracurricular activities, the result is lack of community support and overall negative perceptions. To illustrate, a new-to-the-school teacher speculates, “A possible change in community perception and support of the school might occur if the district would consider developing competitive athletic facilities that would draw folks from across the city to Riverside High School.” He added, “Right now there are only practice facilities for football, track, soccer, swimming, and baseball.”
Additionally, indoor facilities such as the gymnasiums for basketball and wrestling, and auditoriums for the performing arts are not large enough to accommodate the many students/schools that compete in the city league or regional competitions, nor do many of these facilities have the infrastructure for some of the technological equipment necessary to manage these events. Therefore, Riverside High School has difficulty hosting tournaments or other league or regional events that would bring people to the school.

Entering the Home of the Pioneers

The school’s main entrance is located on the northwest part of the building facing two neighborhood streets lined with older homes in need of some care. The school sign on the front lawn of the campus was my only clue to the main entrance, otherwise, I was uncertain about which entryway I should approach, or where I should park. Other than visitors, students dropped off by parents, or students walking to school; the main entry is seldom used. Staff and student parking is located to the east of the school, as is limited visitor parking, thus many of the auxiliary doorways provide primary access points for staff and students. Students commented on the many open doors and how easy it is for some unwanted visitor to wander into the building and also how easy it is for students to cut class without being caught.

The sprawling brick and mortar structure of Riverside High School is comprised of four main corridors with 11 hallways branching off the main corridors. The newly renovated main office houses the principal, three of the four assistant principals, the attendance center, other clerical staff, conference rooms, and a staff mail room and lounge/work area, and is located immediately to the right or south of the main entrance. Upon entering the building I encountered the auditorium, portraits of past principals, bulletin boards, and displays that
welcome visitors, students, and staff to the school. Since my visits occurred in the spring, one of the display cases exhibited a tribute to the soon-to-be graduates, the senior class of 2007. Also located near the main office, across the hall to the south, are the renovated counseling offices, and the cafeteria located to the south and east. I was immediately struck by the vastness of the building with its many hallways, classrooms, and high level of activity before school, during lunchtime, and during the passing periods.

On my first visit, Mrs. Lawrence, principal, provided a tour of the building. She was proud to point out the newly added state-of-the-art science labs and business classrooms located near the southeast entrance—the nearest entrance to the student parking and the entrance leading to the gymnasium and other athletic facilities. As we ambled through halls lined with lockers, posters, and bulletins that reminded students, staff and patrons of schedules, upcoming assemblies, club meetings, and athletic events I noticed clean, bright hallways of the newer portion of the building, while the older portion of the building appeared clean but dim in comparison.

Splashed throughout the building are the school colors of maroon and gold as well as many depictions of the pioneer mascot. I observed a banner (one of several) indicating Riverside High as “the Best School” (a 2006-2007 acknowledgement awarded through River City and voted on by the public) and displays of student work from art, business, science, math, and English classes. Information regarding employment opportunities, teen help-lines, and youth organizations are made available to students through postings on bulletin boards located throughout the building. The types of notices and postings mentioned are typical of most high schools and allude to the efforts of students and staff to create a community of
involvement and support for the school and its plethora of activities. The cafeteria displays 35 international flags that represent the growing diversity of the student body.

Generally, classrooms of Riverside High School are what one might imagine in a comprehensive, traditional high school 30 years ago with the exception of the newly built science labs and business classrooms. Student desks are aligned in rows facing a chalkboard (in some cases a white board) or screen for use with an overhead projector. Many of the classrooms appeared outdated, cluttered (books and papers on shelves and stacked on tables or other counter-type surfaces), and most of them had drawn shades, leaving students and staff unexposed to the weather, sunlight, or neighborhood surroundings. The physical structure of Riverside has not changed significantly over the years, but the number of staff members has grown.

*The Riverside High Staff Grows to Accommodate Student Needs*

When the school opened its doors in 1953, the staff was similar to the staff working in the building today. Some diversity existed then among the administration and teachers assigned to teach many of the same courses still offered to current students. The exceptions surface in the areas of special education and support services where positions have been added over the years in order to comply with new education laws and to accommodate many of the social service needs of an at-risk student population.

Today, Riverside High School boasts a faculty of 100 plus staff members with a mix of administrators, certified classroom teachers; certified support staff such as social workers, counselors, a behavior specialist, a data leader, a test coordinator, and an instructional facilitator; and a cast of classified support staff such as custodians, food service, paraprofessionals, security officers, and clerical assistants. Although I did not have access to
reports on ethnicity and other demographics about the staff, I did observe and talk with a mix of White, Black, Hispanic, experienced, and novice teachers and administrators.

The principal reported that Riverside High has a difficult time finding qualified teachers as well as experiences frequent staff attrition, yet many staff members spoke about themselves and their colleagues as “answering a call.” These teachers enjoy the challenge of working with a needy student population and believe they can “make a difference.” A twenty-year veteran teacher expressed,

There are great teachers in this school. I would put them up against any master teacher or National Board Certified teacher across this district. Anyone can teach in a school where the students come from supportive homes and families and they are economically set, but it takes someone special to make a difference for many of the students we work with.

A novice teacher added,

I came from a student teaching experience where all of the students met standards on state assessments and I did enjoy my time there and learned from my experience. However, my experience here at Riverside has presented more of a challenge to really engage my students. I have learned from them and I feel like I’ve become a better teacher and person because of the challenges.

Yet another teacher shared, “We are challenged not only by the issues that students bring to the classroom, but the burden of mandates to focus on raising test scores while dealing with all the societal issues can leave us questioning how to manage it all.” Riverside High School administration has attempted to reduce the burden that many staff members feel by placing them into collaborative teams or professional learning communities.
Riverside High School’s Student Body Fluctuates in Size as Diversity and Poverty Increase.

The first year of its existence in 1953, the Riverside student body totaled 1,035 and six years later in 1959 there were 1,907 students, most of them White and from middle class backgrounds. The rapid growth made it impossible to practice the original concept of having each department housed in its own wing. The number of faculty doubled and the enrollment more than doubled. In 1979, a new facility northwest of the city’s center, Plainfield High School, opened and caused the enrollment at Riverside High School to significantly decrease. This trend of declining enrollment has persisted over the past 25 years as White, middle class families have moved to growing subdivisions west of the city’s core. As enrollment declined the student population became more racially and ethnically diverse and the school has realized larger numbers of economically disadvantaged students.

During the 2006-07 school year, the student population was 1,233 and comprised of a slight White majority at 51%, African Americans at 23%, Hispanics at 17%, and Other at 9% (other often includes students of Asian, Pacific Islander, and American Indian descent). Of particular note is the fact that a growing percentage of the total student population, nearly 21%, qualifies for special education services. These percentages have held steady over the past four years. The common thread connecting a majority of these students is their qualification for free or reduced school lunch. This measure of poverty illustrates an increasing number of students considered economically disadvantaged. Currently school administration reports 85% of the student body is disadvantaged economically.

The student body, although growing in racial diversity, poverty, students with disabilities, diverse religious convictions, and varying sexual orientations; demonstrated an acceptance of each individual for who they are. Staff and students of all racial ethnicities and
backgrounds could be found congregating together. They were observed interacting in a friendly respectful manner both inside and outside the classrooms, and during athletic events as well as other extracurricular activities. The large special needs population of Riverside presented many unique opportunities that were embraced by staff and students to attempt to understand a world from a different perspective—one that was felt to enrich lives and better prepare students for a diverse world of work or further learning. It was understood by staff and students, “we’re all here for the same purpose, to teach and learn.” The changing demographics of Riverside High School have required school district and building administration to consider various adaptive strategies that can meet the needs of its student body.

*Adapting to the Times: Academic Programs*

At its inception, only 22% of Riverside High’s graduates went on to college, therefore the curriculum has always emphasized vocational preparation. In its early years, Riverside students studied food preparation, family budgeting, childcare and family life in the large homemaking department. The business education department offered courses in stenography, secretarial training, and retail selling and business, while the industrial education department offered printing, mechanical drawing, general metals, woodworking, auto mechanics, electricity, and other trades. An emphasis on vocational education has persisted and saw renewed interest when the school adopted its Career Pathways Program in the mid 1990s. Career Pathways coincided with Riverside High’s change from a traditional seven period day with 55-minute class periods to an alternating day block schedule where four classes meet every other day for 90 minutes each.
Career Pathways was a school-based initiative developed by a team of Riverside’s math, science, English/language arts, and social studies teachers. They designed and implemented a curriculum that emphasized application of core subject standards into two different vocational strands: engineering and manufacturing, and healthcare. When the program first started, only freshmen were eligible to apply, and it required a signed commitment from a parent and the student to attend classes, enrollment in selected courses, and production of a culminating senior project. Each year after the inaugural year, another freshman class was added so that after four years, a select group of seniors, juniors, sophomores, and freshmen were participating in the Career Pathways program. A maximum of 100 students were allotted one of the slots for this program. A former science teacher who helped to found the program explained, “This program was only available to a small number of students and with the benefits afforded those selected students, there was a need to expand the program and provide more options for all students.” Career Pathways provided the foundation for Riverside High’s current reforms and programs.

Current Educational Reforms and Programs

High Schools that Work. In 2003 the Career Pathways Program evolved into the High Schools That Work (HSTW) model that incorporates Career-focused Academies. HSTW expanded the homegrown Career Pathways Program to the entire school instead of limiting its benefits to a small number of students. High Schools That Work is part of the Southern Regional Education Board’s school improvement initiatives for high school and middle grades’ leaders and teachers. It is founded on the conviction that most students can master rigorous academic and career/technical studies if school leaders and teachers (also considered leaders) create an environment that motivates students to make the effort to succeed.
“Riverside has adopted three guiding principles as a result of our work with HSTW: relevance, rigor, and relationships,” explained an assistant principal, a view that was verified by multiple participants of the study.

*Breaking Ranks.* *Breaking Ranks* is a model of high school reform the district began investigating in 2002. The National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) developed it in partnership with the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. *Breaking Ranks* provides guidelines for restructuring large comprehensive high schools into small learning communities or schools-within-schools, an idea that fit neatly with Riverside’s desire to implement the HSTW model. A teacher explained the reasoning behind Riverside adopting the Breaking Ranks and HSTW initiatives was to keep more students in school:

We knew that [Career Pathways] was only working for a portion of our students, but there are many students leaving Riverside prior to earning a diploma. There was discussion of expanding the program to give all students goals for work, a career, or further education.

As the school considered these reforms, the graduation rate was reported at 56.3% in 2002 and 61.7% in 2003. Riverside, although showing improvement, was not keeping pace with the district as it reported average graduation rates of 61.4% in 2002 and 69% in 2003 for all high schools. Riverside High school lagged almost 30 percentage points in 2002 and 25 percentage points in 2003 behind state graduation rates. The HSTW and *Breaking Ranks* models converged at Riverside High and the school’s high dropout and low graduation rates provided additional incentive to expand the small Career Pathways program into school-wide career-focused academies.
Career-focused Academies. In 2003, Riverside High organized into four career-focused academies and a freshman academy that divided the large school into five small learning communities or “schools-within-a-school.” The career-focused academies are designed to promote and support student connectedness and to build relationships among students, their families, and staff, all of which are recommendations from Breaking Ranks. Riverside High School currently offers five academies: (a) Freshman Success Academy, (b) Business and Hospitality Academy, (c) Engineering and Manufacturing Academy, (d) Fine Arts and Communications Academy, and (e) Health Science Technology and Early Childhood Education Academy. Every principal, teacher, and support staff member is assigned to one of the academies.

Each ninth-grade student enters Riverside High School as a member of the Freshman Success Academy. This academy is designed to establish a sense of connectedness with the Riverside High community. Specialized course work such as interdisciplinary units, and HS101 (a unique freshman course emphasizing career exploration, social, study, and test taking skills) form the backbone of this academy. There is also an emphasis on community service, parental involvement, and student success. Although many students declare an academy of choice when they enroll at Riverside, each freshman is asked to formally declare a choice of career-focused academies during the second semester of his/her first year of high school.

Students entering the Business and Hospitality Academy select from Business, Computer Technology, Marketing, and Hospitality. Specialized instruction is provided in Sports and Entertainment Marketing, Entrepreneurship, Computer Technology and Computer
Systems, Accounting, and Culinary Arts. Employment experiences are offered in related career fields.

The Engineering Academy utilizes the *Project Lead the Way* curriculum, which is a pre-engineering program of study for high school students. This unique program, developed by professional field and research engineers, offers a complete career/technical concentration with an emphasis on both mathematics and science. The Manufacturing Academy exposes students to the processes involved in manufacturing through a curriculum developed by professionals currently working in the manufacturing field. Both the engineering and manufacturing classroom experiences are enhanced through in-class work, hands-on activities, field trips, and job shadowing. Students completing multiple years in the academy have the opportunity to compete for summer internships at the end of the junior year.

Students entering the Fine Arts and Communications Academy focus on three areas of emphasis: performance, which includes music and drama; production which includes drawing and painting, photography, fashion, pottery and sculpture, commercial design, and sound technology; or publications which includes newspapers and other print applications. Students are provided extensive experiential opportunities in all areas.

The Health Science Technology and Early Childhood Education Academy is a secondary career education program for students who have a desire and interest to explore and pursue a career in the healthcare sciences, mental health, or early child education. The academy provides students with opportunities to explore a variety of careers in these areas by shadowing and internship experiences. Certification in CPR/First Aid is provided, as well as the option to obtain the Certified Nurse Assistant and Certified Medicine Assistant licenses. Added in the 2007-08 school year, Emergency Medical Technician certification is another
option for students. Dual-credit courses in cooperation with local universities are also available.

The reconfiguration of the school and its staff to accommodate the career-focused academies required new learning and professional development for Riverside’s educators. That need was addressed through Dufour’s Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) model (Eaker, DuFour, & DuFour, 2002). Like HSTW and Breaking Ranks, the PLC initiative was being adopted by schools across the U.S. and was the third major initiative Riverside High incorporated within a span of 5 years.

Professional Learning Communities. In 2005, USD 007 adopted Dufour’s model of Professional Learning Communities (PLC). The main premise of PLCs is to provide staff with time for collaboration and dialogue about effective instruction and student learning. The PLC dialogue focuses on three questions: 1) What is it that students need to know and be able to do?, 2) How will we (educators) know when students have learned?, and 3) What do we (educators) do when students are not “getting it” (Eaker et al., 2002).

PLCs at Riverside High School meet formally once a week during first period and classes for students begin later in the morning. Sometimes the agendas for these meetings are set by a department chairperson or an academy leader; but most often they are driven by central office directives such as work on common assessments and/or pacing guides.

Another purpose of PLCs is to offer a structure for professional learning where teachers are learning from each other and where they address the third question, “What do we do when students are not learning?” Teachers involved in the PLC are expected to generate answers that result in suggested interventions or strategies, which are often included in the school improvement plan and process. Some of the interventions implemented for the
students of Riverside are a result of collaborative efforts of staff members, while others are adopted as a result of reviewing data on students across the district that reveals a comprehensive need or approach.

*What We Do When Students Are Not Learning: Interventions*

The Freshman Academy is one intervention used to assist students in making the transition from middle school to high school. A component imbedded in this academy is a Freshman Course HS101, which introduces freshman students to the various options available to them in the career-focused academies. One of the support staff described this course, “This is where students are given the opportunity to begin the connection of curriculum with the real world. Students are given the opportunity to explore the world of careers and in that context students begin to develop positive connections with peers, teachers, and the school.”

When students are identified as needing additional academic support or extended learning time, Riverside has made a number of options available to them. Support is available during the school day, as well as before and after school. Some examples include time during the day for advisement for grade point average and transcript review, as well as an ongoing review of course/curriculum completion necessary for graduation. Another option to support struggling students are tiered math courses (a strategy used in all high schools across the district) where students can enroll in algebra or geometry courses that employ varying types of instruction and activities and move through standards and objectives at different rates.

Project Pass is a grade recovery program that allows students to receive tutoring while also providing them with a chance to change a failed course grade to a passing grade. Learning Lab is an after school computer-based credit recovery program. When students fall
behind in credits necessary for graduation, they can enroll (at a cost) in courses offered through the Learning Lab. Although designed as an after school program, seniors who are lacking one or two credits may enroll during the second semester of their senior year to work on course completion in order to graduate on time.

While interventions are mentioned by many of the staff members as structures to help students improve academic performance, many students and some staff members suggested it is the opportunity to belong to clubs or committees, to be part of a performance group, or to be part of a team that motivates them to engage in learning and come to school on a regular basis.

*Extracurricular Activities: Competing as Pioneers*

In addition to identifying themselves through allegiance to a particular academy, students and staff alike were quick to identify themselves through the clubs, organizations, or athletic team of which they are a part. “I play volleyball,” “I play soccer,” “basketball is my passion,” and “I like building things,” were some of the ways that students introduced themselves. Educators too identified themselves in the following ways, “I sponsor a students in business professionals’ competitions,” “I coach,” “I’m the JROTC leader,” and “I sponsor the Student Council.” Banners in the gym, trophies in a display case outside the gym, and many photos displayed throughout the school pay tribute the many awards and recognitions that were once abundant at Riverside High School. The awards for athletics or other activities have been few over the past five or six years with the year of this study seeing some resurgence in recognition. The lack of recognition has not deterred students from competing; if anything there is a rising, unified determination to show competitors that Riverside High School is great place to be.
A menu of activities indicates a multitude of opportunities exist for student involvement. Athletic teams include cross-country, track, golf, tennis, volleyball, basketball, football, wrestling, bowling, swimming, baseball, and softball. Fine arts programs attract many students to perform in band, vocal ensembles, and drama productions.

Some of the clubs or organizations, many of which are associated with one of the Academies, mentioned by students are: Business Professionals of America, Distributive Education Club of America, Student Technology Leadership, Occupational Family and Consumer Sciences, Health Occupations Students of America, Pioneer Leadership Club or JROTC program, National Honor Society, Student Council, Project Lead the Way, Pioneers for Peace, and Outdoor Wildlife Learning Sanctuary. This sample list represents the school’s effort to involve students beyond the classroom. Mentioned by one student and repeated by others, “When students are involved in activities, clubs, and sports they seem to be happier, do better in class, and are more accepted socially.” Another student commented, “We need to try a lot of different things while we’re in school so that we make informed choices about what we want to do after graduation.”

Throughout the study, my observation visits took me to the main office, hallways, the school cafeteria, the library, and several classrooms. These visits began in the morning and lasted the duration of the school day, so I was able to observe before school activities, passing periods, lunch periods, and classes in session. Explicit dialogue and initial observations contributed to my first impressions of the research site and its inhabitants. In order to better understand some of the perceptions of the principals, Leadership Team members, teachers, and students of Riverside about teaching and learning, the next section specifies some additional experiences impressed upon my role as the researcher.
Riverside High School At a Glance: First Impressions of the Researcher

I begin this section with my initial observations at this urban high school that I heard was struggling. I expected to hear tales of irate and frustrated teachers and principals who were exhausted from their dealings with “at-risk” and troubled youth and the demands made of them through NCLB. I made that assumption because that is the way the media, the community, and some school stakeholders have talked about Riverside High School. Many of the study participants communicated the constant struggle to overcome the perceptions or labels that abound in the community. One newly appointed assistant principal shared her experience of going to district curriculum meetings as a representative of Riverside High’s English department,

The other teachers from the other high schools across the district would look down their noses at you in your Riverside High School shirt or jacket and hardly acknowledge you. It was almost as if they were tolerant of you, but ignored any contribution that you had to offer. As a Riverside High staff member you felt as if you needed to apologize for being from that school with all the trouble kids.

A novice English teacher was confronted at a River City Health Clinic when he arrived to take care of some screenings necessary to begin his job at Riverside High School. He arrived at the clinic wearing his identification badge for Riverside. The teacher shared,

A teenage girl waiting in the room with me asked if I worked at Riverside? When I told her yes, the young girl conveyed her sympathy for having to work at a school that has so many problems (with drugs and gangs) and expressing her wonder at how one deals with all the drama.
Students also talked about the poor perceptions of the school communicated through the media and community in general. One young African American freshman student-athlete matter-of-factly stated, “I’m ashamed to tell my friends that I go to Riverside because they give me crap. They say stuff like, oh that school. That school sucks. They never win at anything.”

While driving to Riverside High School, I was immediately struck with the challenges of the location particular to this urban school. The school building is situated in a neighborhood comprised of aged and worn business structures, homes, convenience stores, bars, auto service shops, pawnshops, and rental properties. I also noticed some graffiti and trash on and among many of the structures around Riverside High School. One assistant principal shared how the neighborhood was reflective of the students at Riverside,

When you drive through the streets surrounding the school, you will see many dilapidated houses with all kinds of junk in the yards, but right next to a series of those properties you can find a well maintained home with a finely manicured lawn. This is what we see in our students. Many come to school disheveled and unorganized, but then interspersed among those students are the ones who are clean, neat, and organized.

As I approached the school, I observed car-lined streets, students (some smoking) loitering off school grounds or walking to cars, and on two occasions I was greeted by dogs on the loose. Even though the campus is maintained through mowing, some landscaping, and is relatively free of trash, and there are signs indicating pertinent information about directions, parking, and the school; Riverside High School can be described as aged, plain, and institutional.
Conflict Between Riverside High and the Neighborhood

On the occasion I took to photograph the school, inside and out, I decided to capture the essence of the neighborhood. While driving around the school and stopping to snap a few shots, I was confronted on the school grounds by one of the homeowners of the neighborhood who, I now know, lives on the southwest side of the school. This beret-capped, Hispanic man who was walking with a crutch, hollered to get my attention, “Hey!” Not sure if he was addressing me, but not wanting to be rude or disrespectful, I wandered toward him and responded, “Yes, sir?” He questioned, “I noticed you were taking pictures. Were you taking pictures of my property? I’m having someone come out to haul off the old washer and someone is coming to cut down the overgrown tree limbs.” This unshaven and tattooed man dressed in a t-shirt and jeans apparently thought I was a city employee who was following up on a report issued about his cluttered property. I proceeded to explain, “Sir, I’m sorry I inconvenienced and overly concerned you, but these photographs are simply going to be used as part of a presentation for a study that I’m doing at Riverside High School.” I explained my dissertation study. I could tell he was still a little uncertain about me and my motives when he further commented on how he had connections with the River City Police Department and the Sheriff’s Office and had on many occasions called to report the delinquent behavior of Riverside High students near his property. Not only did he want to share all of the inappropriate behaviors on the part of Riverside High students, but he proceeded to complain about the uselessness of school security officers, local police officers, and most pointedly the school administration. He said that nothing seems to be done about students’ misbehaviors (making references to drugs, alcohol, and fighting) and truancy. He shared his threats of going to the Board of Education in order to have his complaints heard and a better chance
that action will be taken, and perhaps, “they’ll fire that principal.” He further explained how he sits in his utility area by a window and monitors the happenings of the neighborhood – that is why he knew that I was taking photos. Although this is the only resident of the neighborhood that I directly spoke to, he confirmed some of the experiences shared by students and staff about conflict between the neighborhood and “troubled” students involved with drugs.

Mrs. Lawrence, White female Principal, responded to my inquiries about this neighborhood resident, indicating that indeed there is an ongoing confrontation about responsibilities for student behaviors and actions within a neighborhood that she believes lacks ownership for the student body of Riverside High School. To illustrate there are multiple views of a situation, Mrs. Lawrence remembered one of her first encounters with this neighborhood resident. The practice football field and track are located across the street to the south of the school and immediately east of the neighbor’s property. Apparently, on at least one day of school when students had to go across the street for football practice, they encountered this man sitting in a lawn chair with a shotgun “at the ready” in his lap. This experience helped to confirm some of what I had heard or read in the media. The school is portrayed in several negative lights; one label that was uttered on multiple occasions during the interviews was in reference to Riverside as the “ghetto school.”

Riverside High School: The Ghetto School

Those closely associated with Riverside High School, the staff who worked there and the students whom attended, all saw the school in a mostly positive light. They believe their school has many redeeming qualities and that it’s a “great school with unique programs.” However, most staff and students acknowledged that the public at large generally held
negative perceptions about the school. These negative public attitudes were sources of anxiety and frustration for the study’s participants. “Ghetto” is the image they most frequently used to describe how the public characterizes the school.

When asked how people view Riverside High School, staff members and students alike, responded with comments such as, “I think ghetto is the perception of Riverside.” Both educators and students critiqued the ghetto image imposed on the school. A principal explained,

A downfall of this school would probably be the attitude and perception, both internally and externally about Riverside High and the direction it’s going and what’s going on in the school. Unless you’re here, you don’t really know about the great students and staff and the type of programs we offer.

A colleague added, “Much of what informs people’s perceptions of Riverside is what is shared through the media. Externally, perceptions are formed around a fight, a bomb threat, or the low test scores that are reported in the paper.” A teacher’s frustration was evident when she shared,

What bleeds is what one reads (referring to the local paper or TV stations’ stories). Not only does the public see or hear just a portion of issues around gang activity, dropouts, poor performance on tests, or uncompetitive athletic teams; but then the part of a story that can be sensationalized, is. That kind of publicity creates a bad reputation that everyone is constantly trying to refute.

Educator participants also voiced a concern that these negative perceptions and resulting labels negatively affected the students’ perceptions of the school and even of themselves. Several teachers conveyed the message delivered by one who is a graduate of Riverside,
“Kids are going to take pride in something and sometimes they take pride in the fact that they are not good at anything. We suck! I think that’s the terminology that is used. It’s a sad thing.” Students confirmed the belief that external negative perceptions impact their perceptions and shared their frustration with the label of ghetto. A junior White male defended the school,

This is a good school with great teachers and students. What gets played in the media is about fights or lockdowns that might be about one or two students. It gets handled, but the stories keep cropping up. Every other school has some of the same issues.

One student suggested that it’s an embarrassment to attend Riverside because the comeback on the part of acquaintances is a simple, “oh.” A student-athlete added, “Yeah, my friends that go to other schools always want to know why I go to Riverside. They try to get me to come to their schools.” Yet several other students commented, “To avoid the harassment, you don’t wear any of your school shirts or jackets.” One student speaking on behalf of several others from his focus group resented the school’s negative reputation based on the bad behavior of a few students, “There are some students who give the school a bad name—they come to school to deal [drugs] and be with their gangs. If they don’t want to be here, they should just leave.” Many study participants acknowledged the ghetto image, but hinted at a change.

Recently, more positive press is leading to an optimistic outlook that the image of the school is changing from the ghetto image to recognizing the achievements of students and staff as well as the unique programs of Riverside. A principal reported, “This has been a good year for us in the paper with more positives than negatives reported. Any time you can get the press to saying good things about you that is how you change perceptions.” An
especially notable acknowledgement of the school’s efforts to embed the career and technical
tools necessary for the 21st century workforce happened in the fall of 2007 when the
Governor paid a visit to the school. Because the state has considered regulations to
implement a greater number of vocational/technical programs along with additional funding,
the Governor is taking time to visit schools where implementation of such programs has
occurred. Additionally, in early 2008, one of Riverside’s students was awarded a prestigious
full scholarship to a state university.

A veteran teacher’s optimism was evident, “I would say that the thing that I’m most
committed to helping change is the community’s perception of Riverside High. I’m not
defeated by [negative labels], but I just think that it is something that we should actively go
about changing.” Optimism was expressed by most all participants as suggested by one of the
Leadership Team members and echoed by others, “We feel we are on the cusp of a
breakthrough—at the tipping point.” Yet another teacher who has worked in several high
schools in the district reflected, “I’d say that term ghetto was the norm about six to seven
years ago, but it’s actually diminished. That’s a good thing.” The stakeholders of the school
acknowledge the negative perceptions about Riverside, but also take pride in the connections
they are facilitating between students, their education, and the community. Even the
perception of Riverside as a dangerous school is misunderstood.

*Riverside is a Safe Haven in an Unsafe Place*

Although the students with whom I visited made it clear that they felt safe at school,
their stories and my observations indicate that concerns about their peers’ involvement with
gangs, drugs, and alcohol are valid. In fact several students commented and one African
American business academy student specifically shared, “Some kids, they just come to
school to get away from the gang activity,” while a White sophomore acknowledged, “there are some kids that come to school to hang out and sell their drugs, they don’t really care about school.” A focus group representing students of the Business and Hospitality Academy and Freshman Success Academy entered into a debate about the fights that have occurred around Riverside High School and even on the property. Another White student who lives five blocks from the school brought up, “There have been lots of fights. The media associates anything happening near the school with Riverside High.”

Almost all the talk I heard about fighting stemmed from a major incident that occurred in 2005. A White male student clarified what happened two years ago, “That fight that broke out a year or two ago involved a couple of students from Riverside, but most of them that actually showed up to fight were family members and friends that don’t even attend school here.” Students noted that much of the gang and drug trouble associated with Riverside High involved individuals who did not attend the school. Nonetheless, this one incident continues to be discussed and images of law enforcement officials and vehicles descending on the school have become folklore. A Hispanic female student dismissed the incident by sharing her intolerance for indifferent students who disrupt her education,

Most of that crap gets started over drugs and gangs. We have students here who are involved in that and they are students who really don’t care about school. The fighting and all that, I just wish they wouldn’t bring it into the school.

Concerns about school safety elicited another story from an African American male student,

It seems like every other week we have a lockdown. Like last week or the week before we had a lockdown because some guy with a gun ran through the building.

There are just crazy people who hang out around here!
The lockdowns mentioned by several students are explanations of one measure of security that is part of the safety plan for the school. Students attribute the unsafe school label to gang activity involving drugs, fighting, and the media sensationalism of various events, but faculty and staff indicated some concern that goes beyond the gang activity described by students.

Administrators and faculty communicated their awareness of some of the issues contributing to students’ views on safety and security at school and at home. During a visit that I made to Riverside prior to an extended holiday break, the principal Mrs. Lawrence indicated, “It has been a crazy past couple of days.” When I inquired whether that was an indication that everyone was excited for some well deserved time off, one of the support staff added, “The students have just been coming in left and right to the counselors and administrators in a state of panic and worry.” Yet another staff member clarified, “Many of them really don’t want an extended break because they don’t know if they will have a roof over their head, food to eat, or that they will be safe from the violence stemming from gang activity in or around their neighborhoods.” The school is seen as a safe haven for many of the students. Students indicated that for the most part fights or assaults occurred off school grounds. Many participants in the study indicated a desire to change the community’s perception of the school and its surroundings as a dangerous environment; they however are cognizant of the amount of effort required and the vagueness communicated about the school’s future.

**Facing An Uncertain Future**

Mrs. Lawrence described her concerns about the landlocked school campus and its implications for declining enrollment and the difficulty she has in recruiting and retaining highly qualified teachers. The attendance area of Riverside is composed of established
neighborhoods inhabited by families of poverty in affordable houses and many rental properties. A part of the attendance area includes the downtown area to the North and many small businesses to the south and west. The area does not offer the opportunity for new housing, thus reducing the opportunities to attract middle-class families wishing to settle and raise their children. Teachers wishing to work close to where they reside often ignore the opportunities of Riverside and locate in outlying subdivisions or suburbs. Highly qualified teachers (a designation of NCLB) are proving difficult to find for positions in special education, science, and math to name a few; as such these teacher candidates can be selective in considering offers.

Mrs. Lawrence believes the dangerous neighborhood in which Riverside sits and the undesirable residents that it attracts contributes to declining student enrollment and hurts recruitment and retention of good teachers, two of the challenges confronting the school. She shared her frustration with recruiting and retaining teachers in a school that fails to make AYP,

When prospective teachers are coming out of the various colleges and universities, it is difficult to compete with schools in the surrounding area where the students are achieving at a standard of excellence and in many cases the salaries offered are higher than we can offer. Also the young teachers are looking for a place to settle and raise a family, not necessarily downtown River City. Even when the concept of the academies attract teachers, once they get experience and another offer comes along they jump at an opportunity for what they perceive as an easier or better job.

Declining enrollment has brought about discussion among district administrators, school administrators, and factions of the community about the future of the school itself.
The bond issue passed in 2000 called for the addition of science labs and business/technology classrooms and some remodeling for the administrative and counseling offices. Staff members wondered why the school did not receive more funding for additional renovations (especially when they see the additions and renovations that were done in several other high schools around the district). They also questioned whether there is a need to do much more with the building when there is talk of erecting a high school for the northeast quadrant of the city. “Perhaps Riverside High School might be closed or used for another purpose” is a statement a teacher made during a large group meeting. I also heard the possibility of the school’s closure discussed by the school’s administration. This uncertainty stems in part from the lack of identity; perceptions of a failing school, and the struggle to quickly show results under a system of accountability.

The negative reputation of Riverside and its efforts to claim a positive, respectable identity play significantly on the perceptions of the principals, teachers, certified support staff, and students about effective teaching and learning. These labels that have surfaced over the past five to six years have influenced the decisions of what is important in the process of how Riverside goes about the business of effective teaching that leads to engaging students in learning. This next section reveals what principals, Leadership Team members, teachers, and students have to say about how accountability policy influences faculty and staff roles and its effects on teaching and learning.

*Perceptions of How Accountability Influences Faculty and Staff Roles*

Each member of the staff, aware of the context of accountability, determined his or her actions in accordance with guidelines and regulations. As faculty and staff conversed about what constitutes effective teaching practice, and how student learning is determined,
they associated their responses to their interpretations of their roles under NCLB and the local school accreditation processes required as part of the accountability system. They rationalize their beliefs about effective teaching and learning, and actions from imposed demands.

*Administrators equate accountability with responsibility.* Collectively, the administrative team believes that accountability means responsibility, as Mrs. Lawrence aptly put it, “Teaching and learning is our job.” An assistant principal concurred, “I associate accountability for teaching and learning with a commitment to do the things we are hired to do and for students to be about a commitment to learning.” “The accountability component of NCLB has forced us to address some issues and students that may have been ignored in the past,” the principal added. The administrative team expressed that their job is to ensure that teaching and learning occur for all Riverside students while hinting at multiple facets of their jobs that can be overwhelming at times.

Because they equate accountability with responsibility, Riverside’s administrators view the majority of their responsibilities in the realm of oversight, management, discipline, and evaluation. This is not to say that they are entirely removed from instructional leadership capacity, but they rely on others, particularly members of the Leadership Team, to model, train, and support teachers in practice. Nonetheless, they primarily spoke about their roles as school managers.

Primary student management functions that administrators mentioned were “attendance,” “discipline and behavior,” “family issues that impact attendance and discipline,” and “monitoring progress toward credit accrual and graduation.” A principal stated, “Unless we can even get our students to school and continually returning, we won’t
have an impact on learning. Certainly not on achievement as measured by assessments.” The administration reported that attendance was better than it has been, but there continues to be issues of truancy, and mobility. When family problems arise such as violence, drug and alcohol abuse, loss of jobs, and illness; the subsequent impact on students can be devastating. Principals described handling the “daily drama” that has become their responsibility. One of the assistant principals explained student behavior issues this way,

The volume of behavior referrals is almost unmanageable. I believe that as their home situations become troublesome, so does their school day. When students’ minds and thoughts are filled with all the drama and wonder of essentials of food, shelter, and safety; they can become disruptive in class/school because we’re asking them to do things that are pretty insignificant to them at the time.

Not only did principals feel the utmost commitment to finding ways to manage behavior while getting students to school on a regular basis, but the administrative team indicated another commitment—a commitment to teachers.

Administrators felt a large part of their responsibility was to create the conditions for teaching and learning to take place. Doing so meant hiring qualified teachers, ensuring they received appropriate professional development and support, and monitoring their performance. Teacher issues administrators mentioned were, “hiring qualified individuals,” “ensuring professional development and other support systems for staff,” and “monitoring and evaluation of teaching for compliance with district and state regulations.” Mentioned earlier, and reiterated by an assistant principal, “The impoverished conditions of our community, and the poor reputation of the school make it difficult to land some of the best teachers.” Another assistant indicated frustration because as he put it, “Our students need and
deserve the best teachers. When one slips away we realize our kids are the ones that suffer.”

The inability to recruit and retain the best and the brightest teachers reaffirmed the principals’ efforts to ensure acculturation and support for the existing staff and new staff drawn to Riverside.

Principals elaborated on the importance of teachers who not only are knowledgeable, but who can relate to kids. Recognition of the role poverty plays in the lives of many Riverside High students, and as one assistant principal suggested, “the baggage that many bring to school everyday,” led the administrative team to stress the importance of professional development, mentoring, and induction as processes in understanding the role of student advocate. One of the principals commented, “Teachers have a tough job, especially in this era of accountability and testing and all the distracters drawing students’ attention away from school. We’ve got to have support systems in place to allow teachers to do their job.”

Once quality teachers are hired and supported, then Riverside’s administrators turn to their responsibility for monitoring and evaluating teachers’ performance. One of the principals shared, “Unlike state assessments for students as a one shot, you pass or fail, this process of evaluating teachers has become one of coaching and ensuring that their efforts positively impact students.” The administrative team acknowledged that within Riverside, other professionals have been hired to assist in the student and teachers issues that consume much of their time and effort, however they do see that ultimately it is their job to account for effective teaching and learning by ensuring the necessary resources and supports are in place.

The demands embedded in federal policy have resulted in the role of a principal or assistant principal becoming so large and all-encompassing, that it is difficult to accomplish
everything that needs to be done to create the conditions needed for optimal teaching and learning. One assistant principal described the enormity of the administrators’ roles,

Presently you have administrators trying to deal with student issues and we’re supposed to take care of the accountability piece with teachers. I’ve been doing this now for 10 years. Unless you’re going to be up here 24/7, I have found it very hard to do.

The importance of managing these issues was determined essential to getting to the teaching and learning component assessed by the administrators as one of their primary responsibilities. All of these administrative accountability issues are addressed under the context of federal and state accountability that have now placed additional demands upon educators to show school improvement and increased student achievement through higher test scores.

Accountability defines the Leadership Team’s role in effective teaching and learning. Similar to the definition used by the administrators of Riverside, the Leadership Team used the term “accountability” to describe their roles within the system and in relation to compliance with accountability policy or school improvement efforts. Members of the Leadership Team serve in an assistance or advisory capacity to the administrative team, helping with the many tasks for which an administrator is ultimately responsible under accountability policies. Their jobs were created for the purpose of monitoring school improvement efforts. They all saw their jobs as supporting teachers but also realized they were required to monitor implementation of activities. For example, the Instructional Facilitator explained, “My job is to try to fit all the curricular pieces together and I do this by coaching teachers rather than consulting.” However, in relation to accountability she walked
a fine line between coaching teachers and her responsibility for insuring that teachers implement the strategies and interventions selected by “Downtown” personnel who were “watching.” The Instructional Facilitator must balance her desire to provide coaching and professional development with the imposed role of watchdog, as the one who is charged with watching and monitoring teachers’ efforts. She and the other Leadership Team members used “learning walks” to document teachers’ use of required strategies and to guide instructional decisions. During learning walks, explained a member of the Leadership Team, 

We [staff members] briefly observe in classrooms, trying not to be intrusive. We gather information from a checklist we created to see how often we experience the qualities of effective teaching we had identified. That data is shared back with the staff. We started out identifying quite a few occurrences of effective instruction, however, as we become more knowledgeable and more critical, it was apparent that we have much to work on. The benefit is that we now have data to back up the adopted strategies/interventions and the data to help direct professional learning.

With the focus on engagement, the building principal and at least one of the members of the Leadership Team mentioned a mantra that is shared in discussions with the staff regarding effective teaching, “Compliance is not engagement.” The learning walks are one example of a tool the Leadership Team believes facilitates effective teaching practices and offers a monitoring or data collection method for evaluation and feedback that leads to informed decision-making. Part of the monitoring and evaluation done within Riverside is to determine student learning.

*The Leadership Team viewed their primary responsibility for accountability as helping teachers prepare students for the assessments.* “I see my position as a buffer to the
demands and pressures to improve test scores by collecting the data, organizing it, and helping to analyze it so that we can determine the needs of our students,” stated the Data Leader. Similarly, the Assessment Coordinator shared that he organizes testing schedules for the various assessments as well as provides structures for “math blitz” and other “test preparation activities.” As the Leadership Team goes about their business, they recognize that much of their time and effort has gone to preparing students and staff for the assessments. A comment made by one of the Leadership Team members, “The testing accountability is just over the top, we’ve created a marvelous graduating class of test-takers,” cynically referring to the enormous amount of time spent on tests while questioning the result for students.

_Teachers view accountability as a shared responsibility for teaching and learning._ Teachers at Riverside High School said they embraced the idea of accountability, but suggested that students and parents should share accountability for learning. One teacher described accountability as, “a necessary component to ensure that we are all doing our jobs and that everyone else knows that we are doing what we’ve been hired to do.” Like many other participants of the study the classroom teachers equated accountability as owning up to responsibilities, but they also suggested, as one teacher put it, “accountability as established through NCLB has placed all of the responsibility on teachers without much call to hold students and their parents responsible to do all that they can in an attempt to improve learning.” Moreover, a veteran teacher describing his frustration that many outside influences are beyond the teachers’ control added to the sentiment that much of the accountability for student performance falls squarely on the teachers’ shoulders.
I dislike the culture of the school. When I say culture of the school I really mean society’s culture. What we see in school is tardiness, not turning in assignments on time, absenteeism, need for immediate gratification, and materialistic values. All of those things occurring around us affect what we do here. Most of it is beyond our control—at the very least there needs to be a mutual responsibility between the home and school to establish common values.

Students of Riverside, unlike the educators, did not readily identify their roles as students or their views on effective teaching and learning with accountability. Rather, students represented a simple reality, “we are just expected to attend, do what we’re asked, and at the end of four years earn a diploma so that we can get a job or go to college.”

Students’ version of accountability, when asked how they interpreted it, was stated as a responsibility to do what was expected of them. When the conversation, however, turned to the context of No Child Left Behind, one young freshman offered a unique perspective of NCLB, “No Child Left Behind means exactly that. It doesn’t matter if you come to school, or do your work; you will be passed on to the next grade.” This interpretation was further explained when several students described situations that they had experienced in their classrooms. A sophomore representing the business and hospitality academy shared, “I have classes where teachers do whatever they can to entice students to come to class. They give out extra credit to students who show up to class. Some teachers give you a piece of candy for giving the appropriate response to a question.” The sentiment from most of the students is that teachers do whatever is necessary to keep from kicking kids out of class because that would look bad in light of NCLB. Several students shared that they had heard teachers talk about No Child Left Behind and all the rules and regulations that guide the teachers’ actions.
Perceptions of the Effects of Accountability Policy on Teaching and Learning

Each of the stakeholder groups participating in the study at Riverside expressed an awareness of the context in which Riverside operates. “Accountability equates to responsibility,” stated one administrator. “Accountability means doing the job you were hired to do,” expressed a teacher. Similarly a student explained, “Accountability means that someone can count on you to do the things you’ve been asked to do.” While educators and students generally expressed a relationship between accountability and responsibility; when they considered the context of No Child Left Behind the explanations of accountability for teaching and learning shifted to discussions of assessments and passing courses, bringing to light questions of what exactly the expected outcomes are for NCLB and what the intended outcomes are for this school.

Faculty, staff members, and students see the accountability policy, NCLB as creating conflicting goals. Staff members want to project an image that reflects success as determined through federal policy in part, but more importantly they want to do what they feel is appropriate to engage students in learning that will offer them choices upon graduation. Riverside High teachers believe in their programs as good and right for their students, but understand that they and the school will be judged according to how well they score on state assessments. A teacher affirmed this perspective when she said,

Even though we know we are creating this unique experience [career-focused academies] for many of our kids, we know that unless our assessment scores increase our programs will not be validated in the eyes of the public, the state and federal education departments, and even our own colleagues in USD 007.
Another teacher described feeling the pressure of expectations to meet the NCLB mandate that contradict what she believes is best practice,

I personally go home exhausted at night worried about whether or not we are doing what is best for our students. I also watch teachers come and go because they can’t deal with all the demands that go against what they believe is an appropriate education for all kids.

Staff members of Riverside want to achieve what is declared in the mission statement: “The mission of Riverside High School is to provide each student with a safe learning environment and an equitable opportunity to develop competencies necessary to become a productive member of society.” However, a dilemma is created when compliance with federal and state policies conflict with values and beliefs of educators about effective teaching. As one staff member, who is also an administrative intern, put it, “I think we need to question what our purpose is and whether or not this focus on standardized tests allows us to achieve our goals in preparing students for a productive and meaningful future, and a democratic society.” An elective teacher articulated the school’s purpose is, “To provide all students with an education that prepares them to become a productive member of a democratic society.” He added, “That statement goes way beyond test scores; while NCLB proposes that if our students don’t pass the test, then we’ve failed.” As illustrated by this teacher, many of the staff members felt that success or failure of Riverside, its faculty and staff, and its students should not rest on a single assessment, but rather multiple indicators of learning.

_Riverside High staff members see NCLB as having narrowed the focus of teaching and learning to “passing a test,” at the expense of critical thinking._ They believed
accountability under No Child Left Behind has narrowed teaching and learning to a focus on assessments. Many of the teachers thought there should be more emphasis on teaching students to be good, productive citizens who are “critical thinkers and problem-solvers.” Focus on test scores as indicative of a student’s educational achievement that came at the expense of critical thinking and problem solving was troubling to many. Many Riverside High faculty members echoed one teacher’s comment,

The judgment passed based upon assessment scores becomes the beacon of efficacy for our students. If all we’re focused on is the assessments, we’re not preparing our students for a future where they will have to make decisions based upon the ability to analyze and problem solve.

A Leadership Team member further elaborated, “It is unfortunate that the most obvious measure to determine learning is the tool that everyone looks at—state assessments that are only one small sliver of what a student learned.”

Teachers acknowledge the good intentions of federal policy and state accreditation regulations that have heightened the awareness of the importance of addressing the needs of all students. However, the caveat expressed by many participants was concerns about the “one-size-fits-all assessment” that does not take into account the different learning styles of students.

Student participants complained about the multitude of testing, but generally accepted assessments as a component of the educational process. They echoed much of what was shared by teachers; teaching and learning on the surface was suggested as “all about testing,” while reflection and analysis on the part of students revealed a more comprehensive perspective. Many student participants of the study at Riverside reflected much of the
rhetoric espoused in educational systems steeped in accountability regulations where student achievement as measured by standardized tests is the evidence of “doing one’s job.”

Some students, however, doubted the validity of that one measure and then questioned what schooling is about and the intended outcome for them. One student voiced confusion when he said,

I think that school is important because it prepares us for our future whether that is college, a job, or some sort of training program. But I also know that what is judged important to colleges is what kind of grades we make and how we do on certain tests.

These tests don’t represent what I know or can do.

Other students felt school was just a process and a series of hoops to navigate, while others are beginning to question what is important in the schooling process. When faculty and students are conflicted in their views and practices, then they often project pessimistic views on to those in positions of authority. These officials are found “downtown” and are looked upon as the ”decision-makers and power-holders” in the system of accountability.

Perceptions of “Downtown” Influence on Effective Teaching and Learning

The USD 007 district office is typically referred to as “Downtown,” and many staff members indicated that district office personnel direct teaching and learning through top-down mandates, which has resulted in conflicting goals. A Leadership team member expressed the dilemma felt by several faculty members, who saw the realities of mandates and directives in opposition to the ideals of collaboration and engaging students in the learning process,

We are given directives from our central office that I’m sure are in response to federal and state mandates, and yet we are asked to collaboratively examine what is
happening with our students and generate ideas for enhancing learning, and engaging students to become lifelong learners.

The district office’s efforts to comply with NCLB mandates for increasing test scores seemed incompatible with effective teaching and learning, a contradiction one veteran teacher pointed out,

We also need to be clear on our goal: Is it that we want to improve test scores? Or, do we want to focus on learning to learn? Quite frankly, I don’t know if those two goals go hand in hand. Maybe it’s that we haven’t gotten to the point where we can make them work together.

A second conflict noted was between the professed need for collaboration via professional learning communities and the accountability components built into NCLB. Staff members of Riverside see PLCs as a desirable way of operating. However, many Riverside High faculty and staff believed they were not allowed to truly be collaborative in a way that empowered them to contribute to decision-making. A Healthcare academy teacher explained her understanding,

One of the things that we’re supposed to focus on within our academies is cross-curricular activities where if a math teacher, a social studies teacher, a science teacher and an English teacher combine efforts to contribute to a common project for a student, then we provide a more meaningful and engaging learning experience.

Many of the teachers of Riverside explained the purpose of PLCs was to share responsibility for student learning with their colleagues. In that regard they felt they should have more latitude to determine such components as curriculum, instruction, testing, and the sequencing of those components. With that said, many staff members felt there was a lack of time to
really put together a purposeful cross-curricular project while meeting the demands of the district to prepare students for assessments. It was felt by the majority of the teaching staff that while there was push to implement learning communities, this push was counter to district-mandated curriculum pacing guides and schedules of assessments that left little time for projects and practical application.

*District pacing guides in particular were viewed as unreasonable, if not impossible.*
Pacing guides are symbolic of the district’s efforts to standardize curriculum across schools. One teacher of the engineering and manufacturing academy captured the thoughts of many other teachers when he said, “We’re asked to follow pacing guides that are intended to have students in the same place, to learn the same material, on the same day. This just is not going to happen and it’s not fair to students.” Several other teachers, in reference to the federal policy, commented, “We are leaving children behind because of our rush to ‘cover’ the subject matter before testing.” A teacher of the fine arts academy summarized the thoughts of many staff members, “What gets measured is what gets taught. The district has already determined our curriculum, the timeframe for teaching and learning, and how we will determine if we’ve accomplished our task in raising test scores.” This was followed by another teacher’s question, “What kinds of decisions are left for us to make?” Faculty and staff perceive that the district office has taken away their responsibility as professionals to make decisions about curriculum and instruction. They see their academic freedom as compromised.

Finally, teachers characterized the relationship between USD 007 district office and Riverside High consistent with the bureaucratic elements of hierarchy, power, control and efficiency. Most of the teacher and student study participants referred to USD 007’s district
office as a bureaucracy exhibiting a hierarchy of control and power, where references to the
district office brought about utterances of “they,” or “them.” It was clearly communicated by
a majority of the teachers and students that there exists an explicit separation of district office
from the personnel in the buildings—an “us” and “them” mentality has been established.
Some teachers and students referred to the situation as “a lack of trust” that exists between
downtown and the school, the school faculty and administration, and faculty and students.
Many teachers concurred with what one teacher talked about, “Accountability from where
I’m sitting is about big brother looking over my shoulder. Big brother, the downtown
administration, is going to tell me what to do, how to do it, and within what time frame it has
to be done.” It was also suggested that in addition to looking over one’s shoulder, measures
of evaluation were used to reward those in compliance and punish those out of compliance.
Thus an environment of demands and threats was thought to be emerging for teachers and students.

Students Feel the Pressures of Accountability Policy and Downtown Mandates

The students are the lowest rung on the hierarchy and even though they have a lot to
say about the teaching and learning experience at Riverside, what was consistently stated and
expressed was illustrated by a senior in the fine arts academy, “Our teachers get orders from
the downtown administrators, and even if our teachers ask us, no one seems to care if we
have opinions or thoughts.” The majority of student participants, even those who belonged to
student council or the superintendent’s advisory council portrayed themselves as token
representatives of the student body and sensed that their voices, even when given an
audience, were often muted.
Students, like teachers, complained of an environment steeped in speed, pressure, and coverage of material. Many students suggested that material is “spewed at them” without regard for whether or not they really understand concepts. Students explained the accountability component as a force that played on their teachers to make sure that material was covered prior to either the district common assessments (DCAs) or the state assessments. Some students made a point of the number of times they heard, “this will be on the test, this material pertains to this specific standard.” Math and language arts or English classes were the classes primarily targeted with criticism for rushing through the content; not surprising these are the courses that factor into the AYP measures of accountability. A sophomore engineering academy student spoke of his concern,

In my math class, the teacher will make sure that we cover the types of problems on the DCA coming up. While she will answer questions when we go through the assignments, it’s very rushed and only a few students have time to get their questions answered. I usually do ok on those assessments, but I know others in my class struggle and when they don’t understand the assignment, and they know that they’re going fail the test; they just give up. It’s like we we’re always getting ready for another test. I know that in math if you don’t get the concept for one lesson, you’re not likely to get the next one because one thing builds on another.

Other students shared similar feelings about pressure to rush through material, attributing this pressure to the district office. A senior fine arts student thought teachers were “just trying to comply with district policies.” Students expressed knowledge of low student achievement (test scores), the need to improve those scores, understanding of district office directives, and presented a sense that most all decisions were made from the district office and then imposed
upon them. A sophomore in the healthcare academy questioned why the district office would continue with “pacing guides” when she rationalized, “Like me, I don’t necessarily do well in math. It takes time, practice, and a lot of questions for me to get it. I can do well on assignments, but I don’t always do well on those tests.” Student feelings of the “downtown” decision-makers were aligned with the teachers, which was illustrated when one of them proposed, “Perhaps ‘they’ should come into our classrooms and teach for a couple of days to see that teachers know how to best teach us, and at what pace.”

While teachers and students attempt to reconcile their beliefs about what constitutes effective teaching and meaningful learning experiences for students with what they view as “top-down” imposed emphasis on testing as the measure of effectiveness, administrative and Leadership Team members found a worth for bureaucratic operations.

*Administrative and Leadership Teams Appreciate Bureaucracy and Accountability*

In contrast to the teachers and students, administrators and members of the Leadership Team believed that a hierarchical, bureaucratic system was an effective, efficient, and a necessary way for a large district to operate. One of the assistant principals, in reference to accountability, described organizational hierarchy and accountability in positive terms as, “a system of checks and balances.” As he continued to explain the reasoning behind this system, he suggested a system of checks and balances was “a necessary component of communication and our efforts to build common understanding.” One of the Leadership Team members agreed with the necessity of a bureaucratic operation,

> When there is such a large system with thousands of employees, there should be a ‘go to’ person who is responsible for making decisions. Otherwise, in a system this large,
you could have every school implementing different programs, utilizing different 
texts and resources, and ignoring equity and equality issues.

The notion of a bureaucratic organization with a hierarchy representative of power 
and control structures with decision-making ability flowing from the top down is perceived 
differently by the various educator groups and students. Influenced by policy perpetuating an 
age-old organizational structure and culture, the perceptions of administrators, teachers, 
Leadership Team, and students about effective teaching and learning are shared in the 
following sections.

Participants’ Perceptions of Teaching and Learning at Riverside High School

Considering the context of increased federal and state accountability, and Riverside 
High School’s identification for improvement; effective teaching and its result, learning, 
were described by educators and students as the foundation for success of themselves and 
their school. Success or failure can be interpreted in many ways, as can effective teaching 
and learning. Administrators, Leadership Team, teachers, and students each discussed 
effective teaching and learning in a way that consciously or unconsciously identifies their 
beliefs about what constitutes effective teaching and various interpretations of learning. 
Additionally, each participant group shared their thoughts of what facilitates effective 
teaching and promotes student learning, and conversely what might prevent each.

Effective Teaching and Learning Described at Riverside High School

To the study participants, effective teaching meant teachers and students are engaged 
in learning relevant material. The faculty and staff generated the four characteristics of 
effective teaching: “student engagement, active participation, teacher who is positive, and a 
generally positive classroom environment,” during a professional development activity.
Consequently, all faculty and staff frequently used the term student engagement to describe a necessary component of effective teaching. All study participant groups described effective teaching as teachers engaged with the students; students are engaged in learning; and material taught is standards-based and relevant to the students’ world. As one principal stated, “If teachers are engaged in teaching, students find the curriculum relevant, and the curriculum is standards-based, then their efforts will lead to explicit achievement results and will be applicable to the students’ future.”

The principal explained that she looks for teacher and student engagement in classrooms during informal and formal visits, “Teacher engagement indicates that a teacher is not just putting in time, but is really involved with the students and knows about them. Teachers who are engaged rarely have a moment to be behind their desks on their computer.” One of the assistants added,

It is obvious when you walk into a classroom to see how much is vested in the students when you look at the walls where student work is displayed or see the environment is one of high energy with high participation by all students.

While administrators discussed effective teaching as being relevant to the students’ world, they also indicated that the practice of intentionally making this available to the students was not widespread. One principal acknowledged, “It’s a work in progress.” Principals thought that as teachers learn how to create relevant, hands-on activities that embed the standards, and they see students’ assessment performance increase, they were more likely to persist in their innovative efforts to engage students. The eyes of the principals were on the outcome of the teaching practice.
The teaching staff, like the administrative team suggested effective teaching is
to them and what that looked like in their classrooms. One English
teacher whose class I observed, described an activity that she had her students in order to
personalize the learning experience,

My language arts classroom had all the desks removed or cleared to the walls and I
created a simulated campfire in the middle of the classroom with snacks and
beverages available for students. This was a culminating activity that would bring out
the students’ reflections about discrimination, racism, and differences as they
internalized a poem titled “Mask,” and integrated the use of symbolism in their
activity. Students were asked to create a circle around the campfire and have in their
possession a mask that they had designed. One side of the mask depicted the self that
everyone outwardly saw, and the other side of the mask was the inner self that many
people did not recognize about the student. In turn as the students passed a flashlight
from person to person, the students were invited to share something about themselves
that everyone recognizes and something that might be hidden from others. Every
student, even those who initially were inhibited to speak in front of the group,
gathered the courage to share something – there was an air of trust and
encouragement in the room.

While this was a veteran teacher with many years to practice and perfect her craft, there were
young teachers in the building who strived to implement the kinds of instruction that they
described as engaging. A young math teacher found ways to motivate her students to pay
attention, participate, and collaborate. She explained,
I usually go over the homework by asking students to teach each other. They come up to the board or the overhead to show the rest of the class how they solved a problem. I usually provide some little incentive for their participation like a piece of gum or a piece of candy. I sometimes use competitive games to keep their interest and desire to perform. For example I will place them in teams or small groups of two or three. I provide a problem for them to work and give them time to work independently, time to share in their group while I wander around and provide support. When most students are finished I ask for someone to volunteer to work the problem for the rest of the class, we ask and answer questions. This goes on for a while and then based upon each groups response and ability to perform with competency, their assignments are varied, reflecting more practice for those who need it while those who were proficient have a few problems to do.

As this example reflects, teachers of Riverside believed that effective teaching was about creating interest, a desire, and active participation. When students were actively engaged and the teacher was actively engaged with the students, teachers felt that learning was taking place. They also differentiated and tailored their instruction to meet students where they were. Teachers did indicate a struggle to construct activities that were always engaging as one commented, “Sometimes we just have to cover the standards and don’t have a lot of time to get to everything. Meaningful activities take time.”

Students also defined effective teaching in terms of engagement and relevance, which for them meant active participation in projects and activities. A freshman student mentioned, “teaching is effective when it is fun.” Others chimed in with comments of “hands-on” and “meaningful” activities. Some students shared narratives of what they believed to be
effective teaching practices. A senior member of the fine arts academy shared a project he was required to do for his government class,

My teacher gave us a lot of different choices of topics to present orally in class. I chose community service. We were required to spend anywhere between four and eight hours doing community service, write a report on the experience and then present that to the class. I was asked to share what I did, what I learned, what I know now that I didn’t know before hand, and how that ties into the government. We always are required to reflect on the experience and what we learned in relation to the class—this one government. It is something that I will always remember because of the actual involvement.

A junior in the business and hospitality academy talked about the usefulness of English for one of the business classes he was taking,

I have a business that I’ve begun through my entrepreneurship class. As part of putting this business together I had to write a business plan and present it to my teacher and a panel of adults. It was obvious that I couldn’t just slap some thoughts together and then stumble my way through a presentation. My English teacher has worked hand-in-hand with my business teacher and me to provide instruction on effective communication – both written and verbal. When my teachers made adjustments to help me with my project, they earned my respect. That doesn’t happen with all teachers.

The key elements that students identified in these and other experiences are that effective instruction is likely to include teachers who are passionate and excited about their subject
matter, respect students, show relevance of curriculum, and instruct through action and hands-on experiences that are challenging and incorporate high standards for quality.

Perceptions of Learning

Learning, the desired outcome of effective teaching was defined by study participants as the application of knowledge. Faculty, staff, and students all defined learning as what a student is able to demonstrate in practice. “Learning occurs when students and teachers are actively involved,” offered one administrator. Collectively, the administrative focus group explained further that learning at Riverside High School occurs “when a student or staff member is moved outside of his or her comfort zone.” As a result of learning, there is change whereby an individual can take in knowledge and then apply that newly acquired information.

The Leadership team also explained that learning occurs when the student can take in knowledge and then apply it. “This learning occurs when students are given the opportunities to interact with the curriculum, the teacher, and each other in the real world,” is how the Data Leader described learning. One Leadership Team member defined learning as “a process.” In other words, learning is about clarifying thought. The steps to thought clarification were likened to a problem-solving model:

1) Know the problem, 2) come up with a plan, 3) work through the plan, 4) examine the results to see if the situation/problem has been managed, and 5) If the result is not what was desired, then begin with an alternative plan, to continue the cycle.

All members of the Leadership Team agreed with this approach and then raised one of the basic questions used to drive the activities of PLCs: “How do you know if students are learning?” One member explained, “The most obvious way to determine learning is that you
can just see it in their face, in their eyes, their expressions—just the whole physical
demeanor.”

Most teachers at Riverside, after a few minutes of contemplation shared a common
type of learning. “Learning,” explained one teacher “is what we are here for. Learning is
growth. Our jobs are to facilitate learning for our students.” Learning was defined similarly
by many of the teachers of Riverside and one teacher of the engineering and manufacturing
academy added, “it is the ability to take in knowledge and do something with it.” When
teachers discussed learning, they for the most part talked about “change that occurs when a
student takes in information and then can apply it.” However, teachers were cognizant of the
view that many times learning is equated with the students’ performance on assessments—
standardized tests.

Students determined learning as the ability to do something with all the knowledge
and information that is gained. Students almost unanimously expressed similar views. A
junior of the business and hospitality academy promptly shared, “Learning has occurred
when you can teach someone else or that you use information that you learned to solve a
problem or teach someone else without thinking. It’s like you create habits based upon
information and knowledge.”

Related to the instructional experiences and referenced in the student narratives,
learning was discussed by students as a direct result of effective teaching. Students of the fine
arts academy observed that if teachers can’t be creative to find ways to meet the needs and
interests of all students, then learning will not occur and students will be left behind.

*Leadership Team believes effective teaching and learning results from the*
*implementation of formal programs and initiatives.* Unique among all the study participants,
the Leadership Team tied their understanding of effective teaching to literature and training they received in relation to the district’s high school reform plans. Given their training in many of the school’s reform efforts, effective instructional practices, and working closely with the district administration as well as the building administration, they are oriented toward specific initiatives. The most often mentioned structures, programs, and interventions were the *Breaking Ranks* High School Reform Process, High Schools That Work and the Career-focused Academies, Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID), Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), and Cognitive Coaching, all of which are in place at Riverside High. However, while the Leadership Team had a sophisticated knowledge of teaching and learning within these adopted processes and programs, the rest of the staff seemed unclear in their understanding of the integration of these concepts and how they could put them into practice.

*Tools that Facilitate Effective Teaching and Learning*

Educators and students of Riverside identified several tools they determined to be difference-makers for effective teaching that would result in student learning. Faculty and staff explained that restructuring Riverside into small learning academies was a move to put students in intimate surroundings where they would benefit from focused efforts of transition to high school, or curriculum and instruction adapted to the students’ interests. Participants of the study mentioned the curriculum standards as a driving force of material that is important to know and if those standards are known in applicable contexts, then teaching of them should be more meaningful to students. The study participants indicated that one way to embed standards in meaningful educational experiences for students was through project based-activities. Another catalyst for effective teaching and learning mentioned by all
participant groups was the necessity to establish relationships that create respect and understanding of each other. Last, but not least, study participants believed leadership was instrumental in the implementation and practice of effective teaching methods that would result in improved student learning.

*Faculty and staff believe the career-focused academies facilitate learning.* Some teachers talked at length about the High Schools That Work (HSTW) model and the academy structure as providing small learning communities for students and a built-in mechanism for showing real world relevance to curriculum that students were asked to learn. The academy structure attracted many of the teachers of my focus groups to Riverside High School. A special education teacher explained the attraction, “When I learned about the academies at Riverside, I was immediately interested because of the special needs students that I’ve worked with.” One business and hospitality academy teacher further shared, “The idea of teaching curriculum through application to a student’s area of interest is a practice that allows all students to make connections—it’s more likely to lead to learning.” One of the assistant principals described learning particular to Riverside and its relationship to the academy structure,

> If we assume that learning is our intended outcome at this school for each student and that we define learning as the ability to take in and apply knowledge gained, then we have an obvious advantage with our career-focused academies for students to demonstrate their learning. The academy structure is premised on the idea that curriculum can be taught in a real-world context where students can understand the value or relevance of what we want them to know. The opportunities to demonstrate the knowledge or apply what they know through the use of critical thinking, problem-
solving skills, and experiential activities are there. I think our students would tell you that these kinds of opportunities to perform might be a better indicator of what they have learned than the tests that are used to judge learning.

The Leadership Team also believed the structure of career-focused academies lent itself to the development of lessons, curriculum, and instruction that is engaging and practical for students.

Teachers of the Healthcare Academy have been practicing an academy structure since the early 90s when Career Pathways was first implemented. This group of teachers has more history and experience with curriculum that brings together different disciplines to create an iteration of project-based learning; “something toward which all academy PLCs are supposed to be working,” stated one of the healthcare academy lead teachers. A teacher from the engineering and manufacturing academy (another of the academies that got its start with the Career Pathways Program) contributed further explanation of the academies as tools for learning, “Ideally when a student picks an academy, they’ve picked an area of interest and we can provide a connection between the curriculum, their interests, and the real world.” This ideal, according to one of the language arts teachers belonging to the business and hospitality academy, “works well for the elective courses, but is difficult for the core academic areas because of the focus on standards, assessments, and trying to fit in everything.” Teachers complimented the efforts of their colleagues to meet the demands of policy requirements and their endeavors to restructure curriculum and instruction to hook students into learning. The academies exemplify relevant curriculum, interdisciplinary teaching, and project-based instruction, all of which are catalysts of effective teaching and learning.
Administrators, Leadership Team, teachers, and students believed relevant curriculum taught through project-based instruction facilitated effective teaching and learning. To illustrate, one of the Leadership Team members stated, “I see some of our teachers using some project-based activities in the classroom. I think we need to build upon the start that we have.” Administrators described classes where teachers had taken the curriculum designated from state standards and found ways to make the content relevant and meaningful to students. One principal explained how a geometry teacher had designed a project premised on triangles as one of the strongest support structures in designing bridges. “When students had to build a toothpick bridge and test its weight-bearing capacity they were able to discover the reasoning behind the theorems and postulates that we ask them to know.” Another principal explained that elective classes lend themselves to applications that illustrate an importance to know core academic content. He shared the example; “Our kids in the culinary arts program can quickly see the importance of measurements and some of the basic science concepts of chemistry and botany with mixtures, thermal energy, and cultivating plants.”

Teachers felt curriculum, whether it was delivered through hands-on activities, investigations of problems, or large group lectures, should be clearly articulated in a way that students understand the expectations of why they’re asked to learn it and how it is important to their future. One science teacher indicated that clearly communicated expectations and standards help teachers use the same language no matter what subject they teach. “High standards are then established for all students,” added a social studies teacher who continued, “and we can prepare students for the assessments that are used to pass judgment on whether or not learning has occurred.”
While holding promise for project-based instruction, there was a concern that the assessment process might not reflect how and what students have learned. A leadership team member explained, “I see our teachers doing as much as they can to create experiential learning opportunities, but they are also cognizant of the need to prepare students to perform at a certain level on state assessments, that are not about performance.” The Leadership Team empathized with teachers who were reluctant to spend time and energy to change instruction when assessments were not necessarily aligned with a more hands-on approach to teaching and a performance to illustrate learning.

Students also spoke to relevant curriculum and activities as facilitating learning. Specifically, a group of healthcare academy students along with a group of engineering and manufacturing students listed, “Teachers who can relate their subjects to students’ lives and past experiences, teachers who can create visuals and hands-on/active experiences, and teachers demonstrate a sincere interest in the student.”

Knowledge of state curriculum standards points to important knowledge and skills that are indicators of learning in the current era of accountability. Administrators, leadership team members, and teachers all identified knowledge of standards as a facilitator of effective teaching. The facilitation of effective teaching was described by administrators as clearly defined expectations of outcomes—knowing the standards and how to implement those into classroom instruction that is interactive and meaningful for students. The principal succinctly spoke to the relationship between effectively teaching standards and passing state assessments, “Effective teaching and learning is standards-based. If we are teaching to the standards through creative, engaging, and hands-on ways, then our students will pass the state assessments.”
Faculty, staff, and students believe that establishing relationships facilitates effective teaching and learning. Relationship building is one of the 3 Rs of relationships, relevance, and rigor, adopted through the HSTW and Breaking Ranks high school reform models. This belief was illustrated by one assistant principal who stated what facilitated effective teaching was “first the establishment of relationships with students, and then building upon that relationship to find ways of connecting the curriculum to the student’s life and potential future.”

The Leadership Team expressed that students were more responsive to teachers who demonstrated an interest in them. The idea of building relationships was prevalent throughout the school and like the administrative team, the Leadership Team members realized this was a foundational concept that would positively impact effective teaching and learning. It was mentioned unanimously by the Leadership Team that Riverside has many great instructors who want to do “whatever it takes” to help their students. They were eager to boast of many of their colleagues as creative, engaging, and caring teachers. The Leadership Team viewed creating relationships among teachers and students as essential to enhancing instruction and improving student achievement.

Teachers in each focus group talked extensively about the need to establish relationships with students and their families in order to inspire a desire to learn. One teacher of the engineering and manufacturing academy described students who come to Riverside High School who have had negative school experiences in middle school and maybe even at the elementary level. “Many of our students show up with a poor self concept after failing miserably at middle school or they transfer to Riverside after they’ve run into trouble in other high schools.” Each teacher group talked about the school improvement plan and one of the
primary strategies to improve learning is the commitment to students and the advocacy goal. A teacher of the business and hospitality academy explained, “As part of our academy structure and the scheduled Academy Time, we are assigned a group of students who we target for advocacy.” This was demonstrated through dialogue with those students and their parents/guardians on a regular basis. Transcripts are checked, weekly grade checks are done, and counseling or coaching sessions are scheduled in order to express advice as well as confidence in the students’ ability to succeed at Riverside and into the future. A physical education teacher shared her concern for the students and the need to build relationships with them,

Many of my students are from single parent homes or the student might even be on their own. Some of these students look to their teachers and coaches for role models. If we can be the person who takes the time to listen, or just show that we’re interested in what they have to say or show us; we may be the person who keep kids in school or keep them from hooking up with their peers who want to take them down an ill-advised path—one that may land them in jail, or in the hospital.

Students from the four focus groups also identified relationships with teachers as facilitators of learning. A freshman talked about the interactions of teachers and the demeanor they exhibited during class time that drew them into the learning process,

The teachers whose class I don’t want to miss are teachers who are fun and can get into conversations with you about all kinds of things as a way to draw everyone into the lesson. It’s obvious when a teacher cares about you. Like when I was absent for about a week because I got sick, one of my teachers called to find out what was going on. Other teachers, it was like they didn’t even know I was gone. When teachers get
on you and challenge you, you know they care. When they challenge you to do your best, you want to please that teacher and you know that when they ride you it is because you can do better. I am also more likely to go to class when the teacher is excited and passionate about what they are teaching and they find ways to relate the topics to your personal experiences. When I have teachers like I’ve described, I know that I learn more.

*Dedicated, knowledgeable, and flexible teachers facilitate effective teaching and learning.* Teachers were described by their colleagues as dedicated, and willing to give of their time. One teacher working with the freshman academy talked of the many teachers who come in early, are available during lunch hours and after school to work with students who need or want some extra help. As one novice teacher of the engineering academy put it, “It’s like a calling for teachers who come to Riverside and stay. These teachers are to be commended for the commitment and dedication that they have for the students.” It was stated that some teachers call students at home when they are absent, some teachers communicate with supervisors of students who work in order to accommodate students’ work schedules and major assignments. One of the teachers in the business and hospitality academy shared, “We act as advocates for our students. Many of them would be lost in the system somewhere if it weren’t for teachers acting on their behalf.” The extra time spent with students or the advocacy on behalf of students was seen as the building of relationships—something teachers saw as contributing to an enhanced ability to teach students. Not only were teacher colleagues found to be commendable for sharing, supporting, and giving; but, administrators were praised for the guidance, support and direction provided to the staff.
Effective leadership is essential for effective teaching and learning. Teachers and Leadership Team members expressed that the school’s administrators provide direction, support, and expectations for what occurs at Riverside High School. Leadership Team members offered commendations to the administrative leaders—compliments were especially forthcoming by those who had been through what was referred to as previous “regimes.” Several years ago, chaos reigned according to the Leadership Team members whereas the new administrative team was appreciated for acknowledging the need to set standards and structures for improved student learning that included high standards for the staff. The Leadership Team was impressed with the ideas of learning communities and felt the administrative team was attempting to model what is expected of the staff and their PLCs. The vision and mission was built from continued conversation among the staff, as one Leadership Team member said, “With the new administrative team that we have, there is more of a venue for collaboration. I feel that we have administrators who will listen and welcome input from the teaching staff.” The push for more collaboration and open communication, it was felt by the members of the Leadership Team, will have implications for better teaching practices that positively influence student learning.

Teachers also were appreciative of their administrators who they believe have provided the school with a direction and purpose. The consistency of leadership provided within the past couple of years was seen as necessary for the school’s continued improvement. One tenured teacher new to Riverside within the past couple of years compared the leadership of her previous school to the leadership with Mrs. Lawrence,

I spent time in another school prior to making the move to Riverside and I was a little apprehensive because of the reputation of the school. What I found, however is an

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administrator who listens to the staff, who advocates for students and the programs and processes that are effective for them, and is working to instill high expectations for staff and students.

Many staff members believed that without a strong leader, change was not likely to occur and that the negative reputation of the school would persist. The teaching staff expressed universal concern that with continued improvement and growth under the direction of a strong leader or Leadership Team that changes would occur to promote current administrators to positions in other buildings. The scenario of “musical buildings” was described by teaching staff as an every year occurrence in the River City school district and was viewed as one that shows, “complete disregard for students and staff that need that consistency.”

Student work ethic and the students’ commitment to education contribute to effective teaching and learning. Lastly, many of the teachers pointed to the students’ appreciation for the value of an education as well as their work ethic as positive contributors to effective teaching. Teachers believed students placed value upon their education, and consequently the work ethic they brought to school and their classrooms, in spite of the difficulties they might face at home. For example, a teacher shared, “My students who often have parent issues or sibling issues to deal with at night, will come to school and do everything they can to please me.”

Teachers also spoke to the effort students brought to competitions in the classroom as well as in representation of the school. This desire to compete and perform at high levels teachers believed happens when students understand “their education is a ticket to a job, profession, and life that they choose—it’s not one that is decided for them.” Many teachers
mentioned that when students strive to do the best they can, it makes their jobs easier and the students’ work ethic motivates them to be more creative and rigorous in their approach to teaching.

The Role of PLCs and Professional Development in Teaching and Learning

Educators of Riverside High School brought to light the necessity for administrators and teachers to continually learning and grow in their understanding of what constitutes effective teaching that results in student learning. Participants of the study referenced PLCs and professional development as two avenues available to the staff for professional learning.

Administrators saw professional development (PD) as a one of their responsibilities that could lead to effective teaching and ultimately student learning. In fact, principals thought PD was essential, if the expectation was for teachers to become “advocates” for students. As discussed previously, the students of Riverside come from poverty and many struggle to concentrate on school when there are so many issues that follow them everywhere they go—haunting thoughts of safety, hunger, and shelter prevail.

One conduit for effective teaching mentioned in the administrative team discussion is the district’s professional development opportunities and the PLC time. Explained by the principal, “Our teachers meet every Wednesday morning in either their department PLC or their academy PLC to explore data, to examine student work, to discuss particular student struggles, and to discuss instructional practice based on the assessment data and student work.” These PLC meetings are a district-adopted strategy for all high schools as part of the district high school reform plan. The facilitation of discussions and the topics for PLCs are an outcome of the district or school improvement plans, or professional development sessions scheduled into the daily operations of Riverside.
One of the assistants suggested that due to the district’s wealth of PD opportunities, their teachers are more prepared than ever to meet the demands of accountability policy and resulting school improvement efforts, “Teachers have more tools at their disposal—more knowledge of effective practice through professional development.” Teachers select one of several times available to come in during planning periods over the course of several weeks to a month to learn about such tools or practices as the data management system, data analysis, reading strategies, problem-solving strategies, collaborative learning, and reciprocal teaching. Not only do staff members of Riverside have opportunities built into their schedules to receive training, but support systems are in place for implementation and follow up through the Leadership Team positions of data leader, assessment coordinator, and instructional facilitator.

Principals reiterated the importance of helping teachers learn different teaching strategies in order to move away from the more traditional approach; knowing that many experienced teachers used methods that had worked for them. Noted by one principal, “Students of today are used to multi-tasking, use of technology, and the idea of teamwork. These are different approaches to teaching and learning than what many of our teachers have experienced.” Administrators viewed professional learning as a way to fill the toolboxes of teachers so that they might engage each student.

*PLCs provide a structure for teacher collaboration and professional learning.* The Leadership team also viewed professional development combined with PLCs as two of the school’s biggest assets for effective teaching. They also believed them to be an avenue to change the culture of the school by building leadership capacity among the teachers of Riverside. Professional development sessions are offered in the building whereby the
instructional coach brings to the staff, 30-minute workshops on various district initiatives expected to be implemented at Riverside under the high school reform plan.

Now in its second full year of implementation, PLCs are a structure that Leadership Team members believe is coming into its own at Riverside as a genuine opportunity for teacher collaboration. PLCs provide the structure for professional learning that is teacher driven within a framework of targeted goals outlined in the school improvement plan. A conversation between the data leader and the assessment coordinator illustrates the status of PLCs, “We have some very high functioning PLCs and some that are still trying to figure it out.” The school has a late start every Wednesday to allow for an hour of time to discuss curriculum and instruction issues. The instructional facilitator stated, “We were told by the ‘downtown’ folks after our first year with PLCs, the teachers are to determine the best use of that time. Agendas are set by the department chairs or by the academy leaders.” Further explained by another Leadership Team member, “It is not a business or staff meeting. Each PLC pretty much has free reign on the agenda as long as it has to do with data, student work, curriculum, assessment, or instructional practice.”

*Professional learning communities facilitate collaboration, benefiting teaching and learning.* Teachers believed that collaboration facilitates effective teaching. They believed a majority of their colleagues are “knowledgeable, caring, and creative” instructors with whom they enjoyed working and from whom they learned a great deal. Teachers overwhelmingly described their colleagues as the “pioneers” willing to do “whatever it takes” to help students be successful. “Many of the teachers,” suggested a teacher from fine arts academy, “are knowledgeable and skilled in their content area, but more than that, they are willing to share their ideas of what has worked with students that may be struggling in your class.”
The implementation of the PLC concept has provided multiple opportunities for collaboration and many of the teachers have taken advantage of the time and expertise of their colleagues. One experienced teacher, inconvenienced by having to share a room, looked on the bright side, “I have not enjoyed having to share my room the past couple of years, but the young teachers who have been in my room have given me new and fresh ideas.” He continued, “I have also had the opportunity to share ideas and practices with these young teachers. Sharing ideas and thoughts has allowed me opportunity to reflect and refine my teaching.” Teachers participating in PLCs, whether by department or by academies varied in their take on its usefulness. A department chair shared what occurred during the language arts department PLC time,

We have had speakers come in to share effective teaching strategies, I have had student assessment data brought in for our teachers to examine so that we can make informed decisions about instruction and content for various English classes, and I’ve also asked teachers to bring student work so that we can examine the quality and extent of learning that may or may not be taking place.

On the other hand, this same teacher shared how some of her colleagues had complained of wasted time when they felt as if not much was accomplished during regularly scheduled collaborative times.

Riverside’s teachers understood the purpose of PLCs to be a venue to share ideas, to take ownership in all students, and hone their skills in a collaborative manner – something that some teachers were able to do and as such their teaching practice, they thought was improved.
Barriers to Effective Teaching and Learning

While catalysts of effective teaching and learning were identified, study participants hinted at several obstacles preventing all teachers from implementing and sustaining effective teaching practices. Student mobility, number of quality teachers, and proliferation of reforms and initiatives were cited as barriers to effective teaching and learning at Riverside High.

*Student mobility limits the impact of effective teaching and learning.* For a variety of reasons, some students frequently move from school to school, which creates problems with continuity of instruction and being forced to test students who might not have been at the school long enough to benefit from instruction. To illustrate, the principal explained, “When students are in and out of your school, or only in your school for a short period of time, it is difficult to determine whether or not your programs or teachers have had an impact on student achievement.” Transient students also tend to have more discipline problems. The administrative team described the effect of student mobility on the school, “Students who are transients often are not involved with activities connected to the school. These are the students we see in volumes in the office due to disciplinary issues.”

*Recruiting and retaining high quality staff influenced the implementation of effective teaching practices that result in improved student learning.* The number of high quality teaching staff was another issue mentioned that negatively effects teaching and learning at Riverside. As noted in a previous section, the principal struggles with “staff turnover, and recruitment and retention of high quality teachers.” One of the assistants proceeded to explain,
It’s not that we don’t have good or even great teachers here, but there is a lack of depth. Once a teacher comes in here and gains experience, they will look for positions in neighboring districts where the teaching assignment is perceived as easier or better. The “daily drama,” as mentioned by one of the assistant principals is more than some teachers want to deal with and some feel that it is not their responsibility and they look for “greener pastures.”

_Proliferation of initiatives and reforms overwhelm the staff of Riverside, impeding their efforts to effectively teach._ Another barrier to effective teaching and learning as perceived by the administrative team is the abundance of initiatives and reforms coming at the teaching staff. “We have a number of reform efforts, some that are a part of the district high school reform plan and others that are more building level,” explained an assistant principal. Initiatives associated with Breaking Ranks, High Schools That Work, and Career-focused Academies are generally understood by all faculty and staff and perceived as necessary to change the school’s culture. However, administrators perceive that not all teaching staff understand that everyone in the building is responsible for implementing interventions like Read 180 and math blitz activities included within the school improvement plan. As one administrator shared,

Even though professional development has provided an abundance of tools to aid teachers in teaching and assessing learning, it may be that there is so much happening and coming at them so fast, they are struggling to make sense of it all.

Other staff members indicated concerns with proliferation of reform ideas and initiatives, and unlike the administrative team, they attributed the barrier to effective teaching
and learning as infringement on time they could devote to doing the things necessary to impact student learning.

*Limited time and resources inhibits educators’ ability to effectively instruct in a way that improves student learning.* Leadership team members, teachers, and students identified time as a scarce resource. Teachers are expected to develop instructional approaches that engage all students while preparing students for mandated assessments scheduled to reflect implementation of “pacing guides.” One of the Leadership Team members commented,

Teachers are directed to implement different strategies, they are expected to follow the pacing guides of the district, and make sure that students are prepared for the state assessments. They have this and this and this to do, but without additional resources to meet the needs of our at-risk population.

This group of Leadership Team members made it known that the pacing guides and assessment schedules impose time constraints on the teachers. They further believe the district common assessments (DCAs) drive the instruction in a manner so that curriculum might be “covered.” A veteran teacher also verified the time constraints that forced them to adhere to strict time lines for teaching according to pacing guides,

What barriers exist for learning? … What I believe really prevents learning for each student is the set curriculum established through state standards and the timelines that have been established for all students—it doesn’t matter if the student has a disability or speaks another language.

Teachers’ comments and complaints of lack of time and resources can be attributed to a couple of different causes. One that was suggested by many teachers is the burden they felt to take on many roles that dragged them away from teaching and working with students.
Several teachers mentioned attendance, discipline, and student reports that were little more than “administrivia” and cut into teaching time. Recognizing the needs of each student as varied, a teacher of the business and hospitality academy described students as each having a story. As such it was explained by the same teacher, “The role of teacher may be changing in that we are expected to serve as mentors, almost like parents or counselors to many of our students.” The issue described in one focus group of teachers is that teachers generally want to serve in these capacities, but when the charge is to show improved test scores, then time is at a minimum to do everything well.

Students also expressed empathy for teachers who had to fit their instruction into brief components of time to meet the demands of pacing guides, so that content was taught prior to the district common assessments (DCAs). A sophomore of the healthcare academy listed all the assessments that students have to take, “There is the SRI [reading inventory], the state assessments, the DCAs that seem to be given weekly, the PSAT, the NWEA MAPs assessment, and the ACT are the ones that I can name.” The sheer numbers of assessments, it was felt by students, prevented teachers from engaging in what they described earlier as relevant and challenging activities. A fine arts academy student compared the deluge of testing as, “the race to see whether or not material can be covered.” The rush to cover material, as students called it, prevents teachers from using a variety of strategies to reach all students.

Second, the lack of resources mentioned by teachers was mainly in reference to facilities, technology and supplies, and human resources such as more teachers or support staff. When teachers commented on the lack of resources it was under the context of policy demands that are not fully funded. Explained a special education teacher, “This school has
more special needs students than most. Special education has never been fully funded.” It was also noted by the Leadership Team that Riverside High School works with a special needs population that is greater than the state average and has many “at-risk” students. “Everyone knows that these populations tend to perform poorly on state assessments,” mentioned the instructional facilitator. She continued, “We know that is not an excuse, but without additional support and resources, we have greater challenges than what other schools may have.” It was mentioned in each teacher focus group that special needs students are dispersed as much as possible in the regular education classes, so the lack of materials and personnel to truly provide accommodations and modifications to the curriculum and to differentiate instructional practices is difficult. Time and resource constraints prevent teachers from differentiating instruction when they feel compelled to teach the same content to all students at the same time.

Students, especially those who have friends in other schools, talked about the lack of materials and resources and athletic facilities and equipment were at the top of the list of complaints. A freshman student described inequities, “I play football and when we go to other schools, it’s obvious that they have more equipment and practice and game fields. It’s hard to compete when we’re lucky to have tackle dummies that are not falling apart.” Another athlete added, “It’s amazing that some of our guys don’t get hurt with the kinds of equipment that we have.”

Lack of understanding students’ backgrounds prevents effective teaching and learning. Understanding the culture of students leads to the development of relationships between educators and students and ultimately promotes student learning. Members of the Leadership Team recognized the importance of understanding the backgrounds of students,
but acknowledged that not all faculty and staff had that understanding. The instructional facilitator explained,

Students come to school everyday with worries outside of school and the work we require of them. Safety, shelter, and hunger may be the most prevalent thought going through their heads. There are teachers who want to teach students responsibility by punishing students who do not have a book, a pencil, or paper. If a student is late, a teacher might assign a detention or disallow any make up work that may have been missed. We don’t always make wise choices in the battles that we pick to fight. Many of these students show up to class unprepared because of circumstances beyond their control and we in turn give them an excuse not to participate when rather than asking questions, we punish to teach responsibility.

The idea of understanding encompassed the conditions in which Riverside students have existed. The Assessment Coordinator explained, “Many of our [teachers’] experiences growing up and educational experiences are much different.” Leadership team members recognized making connections with students and engaging them in learning will require staff members of Riverside to adapt through efforts to understand the world in which their students survive.

Uncaring students contribute to teachers’ difficulties in effective instruction and students’ learning. In contrast to what teachers and administrators had to say about students’ work ethic and desire for an education, some students listed their peers’ attendance and uncaring attitude as potential obstacles to their learning. One freshman student clearly articulated student behaviors or lack thereof, as getting in the way, “Students who are absent all the time cause teachers to have to constantly go back to re-teach and get the students
caught up. I hate when they have to take class time to do that.” Many students interpreted absenteeism of some students as lazy, uncaring classmates. In fact one junior of the business and hospitality academy said, “There are a lot of kids who give this school a bad name because they just don’t care.” When asked to clarify what they meant by “uncaring,” many of these students altered their responses to explain that what appears on the surface is a student who doesn’t care when in reality the student really needs help but is too embarrassed to admit that for example they can’t read. Rather than attending class where their inabilities might be exposed, the student cuts class. Or as junior healthcare academy student described, “Students will act out in class so that they can be kicked out and not have to participate.” Student behaviors were a reflection of struggles and demands imposed through their families, the school and its policies, and fear of embarrassment. Study participants also recognized the sense of self-worth that students felt when they did not, or could not perform to an expected level in their classes.

*Inaccurate assessment of student performance led to the labeling of them as successful or as failures.* Teachers recognized that many of their students when tested through diagnostic measures, are ranked well below high school levels of performance. This was elaborated on by each teacher focus group as an obstacle to learning—especially when learning was measured through state assessments or the district common assessments. A veteran teacher of Riverside expressed the thoughts of many,

Then the way that we measure learning is through one assessment at one point in time. We have basically said that all students will learn the same material in the same time and then demonstrate their learning in the same way. We are perpetuating the efficiency models of the industrial age where our products are not inanimate objects
created from the same raw materials. Essentially, the obstacle(s) for learning are the
time constraints that force coverage rather than understanding and we use a single
measure to determine success or failure that doesn’t really measure what was learned.
The tests really just provide information about whether or not students have retained
enough facts and figures, or they guessed right in order to pass a test.

Teachers, as a group feel a lot of pressure to conform to the expectations set forth in
accountability policy, but also have their own beliefs of what effective teaching and learning
entail. Generally they feel that they are attempting to implement a structure of small learning
communities that place the best interests of students as the focus of their practice, even
though they see the small learning communities as incompatible with accountability policy.

*The academy ideal is difficult to put into practice and consequently instruction through relevant curriculum is a complicated endeavor.* All teachers commented on the High Schools That Work model that has led to the academy structure. They see the potential of the academies, but also see that a conflict exists because they are not able to implement the ideal of academies where all students in the academy “belong” to the academy. One teacher of the engineering and manufacturing academy explained, “I have students who are interested in engineering or manufacturing in my classes, but because my math classes are not pure, I have students with other interests as well.” Another teacher of the healthcare academy continued to explain, “It is difficult to tailor your instruction around concepts particular to one career focus when students from all academy strands may be represented. What we have to do is provide opportunities for application of our content so that students might see how this knowledge is used on the job.” As teachers continued to discuss the academies, they maintained that even though the premise is that they instruct students in a way that projects
the students’ area of interest, they are still trying to figure out how to make it come to fruition. In fact some of the conversations occurring during the focus groups of teachers resulted in comments such as, “I’m not sure, but I think.” The majority of teaching staff members indicated a need to truly examine the structures of the system to ensure they are prepared to teach in a more collaborative, cross-curricular manner. “Just to decide this is the way we will operate and expect that to happen, is naïve on our part,” commented one social studies teacher of the fine arts academy.

Though it may sound as if teachers are critical of the academy structure and its implementation, on the contrary teachers saw the academy structure and its intent as a “difference-maker” for the students of Riverside. What they indicated, as stated by one of the academy leaders is, “Clearly stated curriculum for each academy strand (for each core academic area), support and training from experts who have implemented such a program, and models of success from which to draw,” is necessary for whole-school collaboration and buy-in. The desire was for all teachers to be involved and that was felt to come from open communication about expectations backed by support from all levels of administration. “If programs, and processes that go with them, are important and meaningful for students then,” one science teacher suggested, “support and clear communications can sustain them.” One teacher, a graduate of Riverside himself, suggested room for improvement, “I think communication is lacking and that leads to confusion and uncertainty on the part of staff.” A veteran teacher described Riverside at times as being “disjointed,” but rather than placing blame with the current leadership at Riverside, she attributed it to the “revolving door” of administration. While teachers attributed clear communication from the administration on down as a barrier to effective teaching and learning, students reverted to the emphasis on
testing (results were invisible to students) and imposed time constraints as their biggest obstacles in learning.

Students recognized that the greatest obstacle in their learning is a focus on testing that is time bound. Students from each of the four student focus groups acknowledged that they sometimes encounter distractions in their personal lives, at home, and in their neighborhoods that make a focus on learning difficult. However, students did not dwell on their individual struggles. What the students most often brought up in regard to barriers of learning, is the focus on testing that in their eyes held no meaning. A student of the fine arts academy explained, “We have so many assessments to take and teachers do talk to us about the importance of doing our best to demonstrate that we know the standards.” Although most of the students expressed a resignation to testing as a component of education, as one junior of the engineering and manufacturing academy described, “The state or the district office has determined a schedule of testing and teachers have to teach a certain amount of material before each of these tests— the state assessments and DCAs.” Students generally felt rushed through curriculum without regard to learning. In fact when conversations continued among the student focus groups, many of the students saw no relevance to these assessments reflecting what they have learned. One senior said, “The only assessment results that I have really seen and had the opportunity to discuss was my ACT scores.” Most students wondered why, if there is such an emphasis on testing and importance of high scores, are the results not shared and discussed. It was also felt by most student participants that the state assessments or even the DCAs was not a reflection of what they knew or could do as a result of the teaching and learning experiences provided at Riverside.
The findings of this study suggest principals, teachers, Leadership Team members, teachers, and students reveal that Riverside High School has a poor reputation and that the labels placed upon the school and its staff members and students can be deflating, but also represent a challenge to act upon the mandates of federal and state accountability policy. Generally, the study’s participants view Riverside High School as a unique, good school with an innovative academy structure, many talented teachers, an administrative team that provides vision and at the same time values collaborative structures, and a student body that is appreciative and hard-working despite the many difficult social issues with which they must navigate.

The next chapter reveals the conclusions drawn from the analysis of these findings through the theoretical framework of organizational structure and culture.
CHAPTER 5
Conclusions and Implications

How schools structure and organize themselves, including policies that influence practice is indicative of stakeholders’ values, beliefs, and assumptions. In other words, school organizational structure and subsequent actions of its stakeholders reveal much about a school culture. For most educational organizations, these cultural assumptions are so deeply ingrained it is difficult to conceive of organizing and operating schools any differently. The conclusions offered in this chapter are the result of an examination of the findings through the theoretical framework of bureaucratic organizational theory and school culture. Specifically, Edgar Schein’s (2004) framework of cultural analysis is employed in the examination of the findings.

Terrance Deal and Kent Peterson (1999) suggest school culture consists of the stable, underlying social meanings that shape beliefs and behavior over time. Edgar Schein’s (2004) well-recognized description calls the culture of an organization[A] pattern of basic assumptions—invented, discovered, or developed by a group as it learns to cope with problems … that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems (p. 17).

These complex entities do not develop overnight. In schools, they are shaped by the ways principals, teachers, and key people reinforce, nurture, or transform underlying norms, values, beliefs, and assumptions (Murphy & Meyers, 2008; Schlechty, 2001). Schein (2004) suggests that culture manifests itself at three levels: observable artifacts, shared espoused beliefs and values, and tacit assumptions. In this chapter I will further identify
inconsistencies between the values of educators and students of Riverside High School about teaching and learning, and what is actually occurring (or the extend to which the value is acted upon).

**Artifacts of Riverside High School**

At the surface level of the organizational culture are artifacts (realities), which includes all the experiences that one can see, hear, and feel when encountering a new group. The artifacts of Riverside High School are discussed in the following sections.

**Artifacts That Evoke Images of Scientific Management and Bureaucracy**

A traditional school structure is representative of principles of scientific management and steeped in bureaucratic tenets of a hierarchy of power and control (Schoen & Fusarelli, 2008; Sunderman et al., 2005; The Commission on No Child Left Behind, 2007). At Riverside High, beginning at the top with district administration imposing demands on the school that the administrative team in turn imposes on teachers who then impose them on students, the hierarchy flows from the top down and power is exercised throughout the district. These demands take the form of reforms and programs district office personnel decide are appropriate and then implemented without consulting the teachers. Teachers have little input into the programs and decisions made that affect teaching and learning at Riverside. Students who serve as the focal point for efforts of educators within River City School District and Riverside High School are rarely asked for input and feel as if their voices are nonexistent.

Riverside High School’s structure and practices of Carnegie units, bell schedules signaling the start and stop of learning, subjects taught separately from one another, pacing guides dictating what is to be taught and when, and testing of prescribed knowledge, all
represent an organization subservient to time and schedules. These time-honored practices exemplify the influence of scientific management on Riverside and other contemporary schools.

Moreover, accountability through monitoring and evaluation from district, state and federal regulations and mandates further reinforce the bureaucratic culture that exists at Riverside (Callahan, 1962; Darling-Hammond, 2004). Images of "big brother" monitoring and "somebody always watching," are illustrations of the lack of trust that exists between teachers and administrators. Standardized curriculum, pacing guides, and district created assessments are designed to be "teacher-proof," that is, they leave no opportunity for creativity or deviation from the script. Teachers feel that administrators do not trust them to be accountable without mandates. Teachers are not treated like well-educated professionals, but like workers in a factory who must be told what to do.

Artifacts Evidenced in Negative Labels of the School

All participants of the study pointed out the many negative labels placed on the school, such as "ghetto, failing, and dangerous." Staff and students alike, shared stories of the gang affiliation of some students and how some students come to school to "deal." The percentage of students meeting proficiency on state assessments at Riverside are published in the local paper, showing comparisons of all schools in the region and pointing out all schools identified for improvement. Not only are state assessment scores indicative of the "failing" label, but the sports arena has not produced a winning team in either of the two major sports, football and basketball. The image of Riverside as a dangerous place is illustrated through the local media (both print and visual) and is fueled with episodes of law enforcement showing up at the school, such as "ghetto, failing, and dangerous," illustrations of the lack of trust that exists between teachers and administrators.
school and continued talk of fights and lock downs. These incidents circulate throughout the school and stories about them become part of the school’s folklore. Although negative labels were evidenced throughout the dialogue of faculty, staff, and students of Riverside, it was also evident in their behaviors and voices that those labels were motivators to change.

Culture change, according to Senge (1999, 2004), can be stirred by something as simple as someone’s perception, which defines his or her reality. Deal and Peterson (1999) further explain that a reputation builds over time and is shaped by critical incidents, forged through controversy and conflict, and crystallized through triumph and tragedy, all of which can be addressed as people cope with the problem. Faculty, staff and students commented on negative labels as an issue that they are tired of fighting. Multiple participants said the negative labels were not “defeating,” rather they fueled a desire to do everything to produce different results. Through different results, Riverside’s educators and students wanted to improve the school’s reputation and prove the worth of the school.

Artifacts of History and Tradition Connect to the Past, and Look to the Future

To some faculty, staff, and students the school’s future lies in the past, as evidenced by their desire to turn back time, to garner pride and a commitment to excellence that was once the norm at Riverside. Pride in the pioneer spirit, the history and traditions established at Riverside are demonstrated throughout the building with banners, awards, trophies, photos, and the school colors and mascot. The faculty, especially those who once attended Riverside were eager to reminisce about the days gone by when Riverside was recognized for academics and state championships for athletics. Faculty and staff take opportunities to share the “glory days” with students in an attempt to instill pride, commitment to excellence, and sense of hope that they too can succeed. The number of activities, clubs, and programs
available to students and their parents reflects the desire of faculty and staff of Riverside to create pride, belonging, and build a competitive spirit for success.

Historically, Riverside High School has always focused on vocational education, and a strong vocational component is part of the school’s future as well. While success is currently defined as accountability and athletics, Riverside faculty and staff have attempted to look beyond the test scores and continued to emphasize career and technical education delivered through career-focused academies. In these academies teaching and learning are about cross-curricular connections, relevance, application, and critical thinking. The creation and implementation of career-focused academies represents both a renewed interest in career and vocational education and at the same time is viewed as more of a pioneer adventure to redesign curriculum and instruction.

Artifact Representing Reform

Reform efforts at Riverside High School represent an attempt to improve the school’s educational experiences for its students. Much of the impetus for reform or improvement comes from Riverside’s identification for improvement under NCLB. One obvious artifact representing reform is the school improvement plan that also reflects the district’s improvement plan as well as the district’s reform plan for high schools. These plans outlined several initiatives considered part of the reform process: differentiation, cooperative learning, Read 180, math blitz activities, and tiered courses. Many of these initiatives have been implemented throughout the district and are all encompassing. The district’s one-size-fits-all approach to reform is further indicative of scientific management principles. Teachers did not see connections between these myriad interventions and improved student achievement.
The career-focused academy concept is the most obvious reform effort at Riverside High School. Literature and advertisements about Riverside High School explain the structure of the school around career clusters indicative of relevant curriculum offering meaningful learning experiences in the workforce. Banners and work of students are proudly displayed around the school with designation of the various academies. Faculty, staff and students, all talked about academies, introduced themselves as part of an academy—many wore shirts or jackets designating his or her affiliation. Faculty, staff and students exhibited a sense of belonging and as such were eager to identify with an academy.

Additionally faculty, staff, and students pointed to the academies as the hope for students’ future and a difference-maker in connecting school to the students’ lives. The idea of reform through career and technical education has a history in the research literature as a means to improved student achievement. Poverty at Riverside High School was a condition that had propelled many students to drop out of school so that they might focus on work. Other students of Riverside found school meaningless when an emphasis was placed on college preparatory curriculum. Riverside staff members followed the path suggested by research on high school reform when initiatives proliferated in response to several factors linked to poor achievement and high dropout rates in urban high schools: large size, rigid curricular tracking, departmentalization, and disjointed curriculum lacking relevance (Boyer, 1983; Carnegie Forum, 1986; Goodlad, 1984; Oakes, 1985; Powell, Farrer, & Cohen, 1985; Sizer, 1984). Unlike the career-focused academy initiative that stemmed from a home grown idea of the Career-Pathways program; Breaking Ranks was a result of the district administration’s analysis of multiple failures in the high schools across the River City District.
The core values of Breaking Ranks; relationships, relevance and rigor, are evident throughout Riverside High. Although Breaking Ranks was imposed upon them, the school’s administrators and staff openly expressed these core values. Staff and students believed in the idea of building relationships as a key component to effective teaching and learning. Educators especially noted they could not engage students in learning if the student felt no connection to teachers or administrators. Riverside administration, faculty, and students referenced relevance as a “built-in” component of the career-focused academies; an application that was apparent through the experiential opportunities afforded the students of each academy. Rigor was a component that many administrators and teachers discussed as the “next step” in implementation of the Breaking Ranks core values.

High Schools That Work (HSTW) brought structure to the school-based Career Pathways program initiated in the mid 1990s that eventually became the expanded Career-focused Academies. Riverside’s administration viewed the adoption of a full-blown HSTW model as a way to increase the rigor of their curriculum, an enhancement to the Career Pathways curriculum developed in-house. Keeping with the bureaucratic model, the adoption of HSTW structures also created additional constraints, procedures, and monitoring tools to ensure the integrity of its implementation. Consequently, Riverside moved from a faculty-developed Career Pathways program to a prepackaged program with its own curriculum standards, assessments, and oversight responsibilities. The adoption of this program suggests a lack of trust in the school and its administrators and teachers, who were perceived as unable to develop their own rigorous, standards-based curriculum and program.

In order to support and sustain school improvement that results in improved student learning; administrators, faculty, and staff viewed educating and training the school staff as
essential. To address this need, USD 007 adopted PLCs, one of the most current and successful models of professional learning (Eaker et al., 2002; Zmuda, Kuklis, & Kline, 2004). Even though the district office made the decision to implement PLCs, staff members of Riverside liked the idea of being able to learn collaboratively with a focus on student learning. They were appreciative of the time built into their weekly schedules to learn with and from each other. While staff embraced the ideal of PLCs, many educators voiced frustration over imposed constraints of how district office personnel determined that their PLC time was to be utilized to work on district mandates. Many staff members had difficulty with drawing parallels to the intent of PLCs and actual operations of them. That is, the intent of PLCs was for faculty to take charge of them, yet district and building administrators determined the topics and focus of the meetings, again suggesting they do not trust teachers to use this time effectively if left to their own volition.

*Artifacts Pointing to Acceptance and an Appreciation for Each Other*

Riverside High School is home to a racially diverse student body and a high number of special needs students. Students and faculty of Riverside expressed an appreciation for the differences among them. Students were heard to say such things as, “we have all kinds of students here and I’m glad that I get to know and work with people that may not be like me. I will be more prepared for work or college.” Teachers also expressed their appreciation for the learning and growth opportunities available to all when they listen to each other and attempt to understand one another. When students were seen in class, in the hallways, and in teams or clubs in groups consisting of Black, White, Hispanic students as well as encompassing students with physical disabilities, there was an obvious acceptance of each other for who they are. Teachers and administrators talked matter-of-factly about having
diverse classes that included students with disabilities. This situation was not viewed as an imposition, but the way things are and a chance to view the world from different perspectives.

Artifacts of Teaching and Learning

Riverside faculty, staff, and students identified that instruction in Riverside classrooms needed to be engaging and meaningful to students’ lives. Theories of effective teaching expressed by Riverside’s educators and students fall in line with Charlotte Danielson’s (2007) framework for teaching. She has posited that effective teaching is a set of responsibilities that result in improved student learning. Of the four domains that she outlines: planning and preparation, the classroom environment, instruction, and professional responsibilities; the one she deemed the primary mission of schools is instruction. It is under the domain of instruction that several components are explained as integral parts of teaching: communicating with students, using questioning and discussion techniques, engaging students in learning, using assessment in instruction, and demonstrating flexibility and responsiveness to individual students. Riverside stakeholders claim and describe many of these same ideas, but realize their unfulfilled execution of all of these components.

Teaching and learning observed at Riverside was typically exhibited through lecture or demonstration, practice, and further discussion or feedback provided by teachers to students. Principals, teachers, and students were in agreement that the norm in instructional practice at Riverside was lecture and testing in order to determine if the teaching led to learning. Student learning was exemplified primarily through quiz or test results, an occasional discussion, or less frequently via demonstration or presentation. Teachers and students were critical of pacing guides that dictated what was taught and when it was taught.
The ‘how’ was interpreted by many Riverside educators as whatever is the quickest means to deliver the bulk of the standards-based content. These practices reflect the bureaucratic tendencies engrained in the school’s operational procedures, where efficiency is valued.

Pacing guides and standardized assessments heavily influenced teaching practices. While Riverside educators and students recognized effective instructional practices that positively influenced learning, they talked extensively of time constraints to cover material before testing. The district’s pacing guides direct teachers in what to teach and when. Pacing guides were described as further indication of “lack of trust.” Schedules of assessments are posted in classrooms and on the district website. Pacing guides and curriculum standards are issued to teachers upon hiring and then revisited at least annually through training and staff development sessions.

Elements of scientific management and bureaucracy exist at Riverside and are readily recognized as artifacts, however, some artifacts suggested a different way of operating, such as career-focused academies and professional learning communities. So, while artifacts represent what one experiences through sight, sound, and touch, there are values expressed by educators and students of Riverside not fully realized, acted upon, or embedded in practice. As such these are identified as espoused values.

Espoused Values (What is Stated as Desired) at Riverside High School

Espoused values, described by both Edgar Schein (2004) and Chris Argyris (1999), are what individuals and group say is important to them. In other words, espoused values are desires hypothesized initially based upon a conviction. Espoused values apparent through examination of the findings at Riverside are analyzed in the following sections.
Teachers Value Collaboration and Desire Shared Leadership

Riverside faculty and staff value collaboration and have been given multiple opportunities for professional learning through PLCs. Theoretically, PLCs or collaborative time with colleagues is meant to lessen the hierarchy and to empower teachers with decision-making abilities with regard effective teaching practice and its intended outcome, student learning (Eaker et al., 2002; Hord & Sommers, 2008). On the one hand, the PLC concept at Riverside High School was understood as a structure in which faculty and staff could collaborate on learning toward curricular issues of curriculum alignment, standards, assessments; student work, and instructional practices. On the other hand, the professional learning was not driven by teachers, but was directed by district and building administrators. In typical hierarchal fashion, the district office established the goal of shared learning, which was carried out by administrators and Leadership Team members and then delivered to teachers.

Faculty and staff members as well as students indicated a respect for the administrative direction and support provided as they go about the day-to-day activities. Riverside educators did, however, indicate that leadership is shared among the five administrators, who delegate most responsibilities for instructional leadership to the Leadership Team. Leadership Team members have been placed in the position of quasi-administrators, which is not how they want teachers or other colleagues to perceive them. Although Riverside’s teachers appreciated the stability the current administration has brought to the school, the administrative team functions as a benevolent dictatorship, directing, delegating, and managing the work of the staff. Teachers do not directly participate in making substantive decisions that affect teaching and learning.
Teachers Value Open Two-Way Communication

Riverside teachers expressed a desire for open two-way communication that is informative and educative for all stakeholders. The idea of two-way communication is another way staff might realize the ideal of collaboration that results in shared decision-making. Two-way communication also aligns with the idea of professional learning communities. Teachers, however, believe they are not receiving all the information they need to be effective. Faculty and staff conveyed an appreciation for the current administration being more open in listening to concerns of the staff and students by using an “open door policy.” Although building leadership capacity and shared decision-making was something the classroom teachers valued, an open door policy was not enough, they also respected their official leaders more when they were collaborative rather than delegating or mandating.

When information flows freely among the administration, the teachers, members of the Leadership Team, and students, then expectations became everyone’s responsibility, lessening confusion about the goals and methods for improved student learning is (Cooper, Ponder, Merritt, & Matthews, 2005). Cooper and colleagues found that open two-way communication is a way to build leadership capacity that is necessary to improve instruction and student achievement.

Administrators and Leadership Team Value Bureaucracy

Riverside administrative team members and Leadership Team members, unlike the teaching staff or students, expressed an appreciation for bureaucratic practices that allow them to smoothly manage the school. They mentioned their roles as defined by accountability measures of testing where each is responsible for management of others to make sure that standards are addressed and as a result students learn to high levels. A hierarchy of control
and power are preserved under the NCLB measures. It was argued by the administrative team that a system of checks and balances was a positive measure that offered a way to clearly communicate expectations and operational procedures, leaving little room for interpretation and error. In this scenario, one-way communication is the most efficient way to operate.

Additionally, the administrators found the bureaucratic hierarchy essential to the multi-faceted position in which they worked. Members of the administrative team explained their obligations to deal with all the social issues of health and safety brought to the school by students. They went on to describe teacher issues of hiring, observing and evaluating that demanded more time than they have to give. In fact, the administrative team struggled with the role of administrator and manager forced by accountability policy and the role desired by their staff and themselves as instructional leaders. The bureaucratic hierarchy allowed them to delegate their instructional leadership responsibilities to members of the Leadership Team.

Reforms are Valued

As a school identified for improvement and with all the negative labels attached, Riverside High School and the District of River City place a great deal of trust in research-based reforms or strategies to turn things around. After all, this is one of the major pillars of NCLB; that schools and districts will use proven, scientifically researched strategies to turn around their schools and districts. Within the past five years Riverside implemented elements of Breaking Ranks, High Schools That Work, Career-focused Academies, and PLCs as major components of their reform and school improvement plans.

Riverside faculty and staff believed Breaking Ranks introduced a framework for discussion about key components leading to school improvement. What the staff valued about this framework was the focus on three components of relationships, relevance, and
rigor. They further believed these components were making a difference in their practice because of their personal convictions about effective teaching and learning. The career-focused academies were valued for their practicality. Many staff mentioned that the career-focused academies are what attracted them to Riverside in the first place. They valued the concept of career-focused academies because of the many experiential opportunities afforded students. Students indicated their attraction to Riverside for the practical experiences associated with the career-focused academies. This is an important consideration for many students who see their future in the workforce rather than higher education. At Riverside students indicated they have access to both workforce skills and a rigorous curriculum.

Riverside’s administration and staff members valued the reforms they had a say in choosing, developing, and implementing. They are concerned that they are trying to implement too many reforms that have not gone through the recommended process of identifying reforms appropriate for their school.

Knowledgeable, Passionate, and Caring Educators are Valued

Educators and students unanimously declared that knowledgeable, passionate and caring teachers make a difference for effective teaching and learning. Educators and students of Riverside believed it was important to know the standards, but also understood what those standards in practice look like so that they might be more creative in reaching out to the students with varied interests. Research indicates that teachers are able to be more creative when designing instructional units if they are knowledgeable in the subject or grade level they have been assigned to teach (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001; Schmoker, 2006). Teachers suggested that if they display an enthusiasm for what they teach, they often found their
enthusiasm to be contagious for their students. Students concurred in remarks suggesting that they are more likely to learn something about which their teachers were passionate.

Riverside staff and students’ perceptions align with much of the research and literature on effective teaching that leads to improved student learning. Students unanimously stated that when teachers demonstrated an interest in them, they understood the teacher to care. Both educators and students described the acts of listening, asking a simple question or making a salutary remark, and attending extracurricular events as demonstrations of caring. Students explained they would work harder to please a teacher who demonstrated an act of care. Riverside stakeholders value knowledgeable, passionate, and caring educators. When relevance is included in the formula for teaching and learning, then they perceive students to be more engaged with learning.

Relevant and Applicable Curriculum and Instructional Practices are Valued

Riverside’s career-focused academies exemplify relevant and applicable curriculum and instructional practices. Administrators, teachers, and students of Riverside described the context of the career-focused academies as preparation for the students’ future. When Riverside educators and students explained how they view effective teaching and learning, they include many of the proponents of reform models implemented in the district and at Riverside. They believe problem- or project-based activities are what connect the content to students’ lives and futures. Teachers and Leadership team members valued differentiated instruction as a way to personalize learning opportunities of individual students with varying levels of skills and abilities. Multiple teachers and students valued classroom activities designed to reach the same objective or curriculum standard, but in different ways that account for individual learning styles and academic background knowledge. Many staff
members struggled to reconcile the contradiction between district mandates that have narrowed the curriculum, pacing guides, and emphasis on standardized tests with their desire to implement what they have learned through their indoctrination to the Breaking Ranks Reform: no two students are exactly alike and no one student stays exactly the same over his or her years in high school, batch processing does not work for adolescents, therefore personalization is necessary (National Association of Secondary School Principals, 2004). Riverside faculty and staff believed that relevance and applicable curriculum and instruction represented effective teaching, but under the pressure to increase test scores, they felt constrained from implementing these practices.

Because a majority of Riverside’s students are oriented toward work rather than academics, staff members felt obligated to find a connection between the student’s known world and the possibilities ahead of them. The intent of asking students to research a career of focus and then select an academy was described as a way to help students understand the academic content necessary to support them in pursuing employment or further study in a field of interest. Students discussed the experiential opportunities of job shadowing in the healthcare industry, in the manufacturing plants, working with engineers in the aircraft manufacturing field, of internships with print and broadcast media, of work in hotels and restaurants to name a few motivational and connecting forces for furthering their education. In supporting the same theory, Blum (2005) argued that when teachers make learning meaningful and relevant to their students’ lives, students develop a stake in their own education.
The Application of Knowledge as Demonstration of Learning is Valued

Staff and students of Riverside High School explained learning as a purpose of the school. More precisely they suggested that learning did not occur unless the information or knowledge taught was applicable in a real world context. Students even suggested that if real learning took place, then a habit was formed so that one didn’t even need to think prior to action. Although their descriptors are not as sophisticated as those of researchers and practicing educators, students’ beliefs were validated by the satisfaction they found in their ability to problem-solve and help others through in class activities. Students and teachers or sponsors of various competitions talked about the success students have in critical thinking tasks when they can put together a business plan, construct a model design, or demonstrate a first aid intervention to show the knowledge gained and show the application.

Assumptions at Riverside High School

Schein (2004) describes assumptions as those solutions to problems that work repeatedly. In other words, everyone in the organization accepts a practice as reality—the way something is done because of prior success. Educators and students of Riverside demonstrated or discussed nonconfrontational and nonnegotiable practices or processes as: testing is a measure of learning and subsequently teaching strategies should focus on what is tested, top-down management is perceived as the only way to organize and operate schools, teachers and students are not trusted to make decisions about curriculum and instruction; bureaucracy demands standardization, and ultimately a bureaucratic culture is inconsistent with perceptions of educators and students about effective teaching and learning. These tacit assumptions contribute to the conflicts created under the umbrella of the bureaucratic culture.
Effective Teaching and Learning vs. Teaching to the Test

Testing is a measure of learning that is an unquestioned assumption. As such, it is subsequently assumed that teaching strategies should focus on what is tested. These assumptions contradict what educators and students believe about effective teaching and learning. Findings of this study indicated that educators and students value teaching practices that are engaging, hands-on, and at the same time rigorous enough to challenge students. The study participants see the career-focused academies as a structure offering opportunities to create and implement such practices. However, because testing has been the established norm for measurement of learning and practiced for years, educators and students struggle to conceive of measured learning in any other way. Findings of this study reveal a more sophisticated knowledge of effective teaching and learning on the part educators and students. All stakeholders of Riverside High School are in agreement that the application of knowledge is a better determination of learning than standardized, objective state assessments or district common assessments. However, espoused values, according to Schein (2004), can only become an unquestioned, accepted practice if the results of implemented values produce the desired outcomes repeatedly. Standardized, mass testing is a practice of measured learning that has worked for many students over the last century (Darling-Hammond, 2004). Until proven results with performance-based, authentic assessments are used with repeated success over time, a change in accepted and recognized practice is unlikely (Darling-Hammond, 2004; Weick, 2001).

Conflict Between Hierarchy and Collaboration

Top-down management is assumed to be the only way to organize schools. It is an embedded practice with years of effectiveness for the people in power and control.
Collaboration means surrendering some responsibilities to others in the organization and empowering and trusting others to make good decisions on behalf of the organization. Administrators and others in leadership positions, although supportive of the concept of collaboration, found it difficult to empower the staff to collaborate and shared in decision-making. Loss of power and control could render the leaders threatened or insecure.

Collaboration and shared decision-making cannot co-exist with top-down management. The principles of hierarchical operations and collaboration are contradictory in theory and practice.

Although relationships are valued at Riverside, hierarchy does not facilitate relationships, either between administration and teachers or between teachers and students. Evaluation and monitoring by someone in an authoritative position is practice in a bureaucratic hierarchy while in collaborative communities of professional learning the practice of questioning for reflection and learning (not judgment or measuring) is the norm.

At Riverside administrators described their responsibilities as oversight rather than collaborative inquiry that could lead to shared decision-making.

**External Mandates and Accountability are Necessary to Effect Change**

It is assumed through the way that school organizations operate—the culture—that teachers and students can’t be trusted to make decisions for what is best or right for the school organization and the learning process it employs. In other words teachers and students cannot be trusted to hold themselves accountable for doing what needs to be done for effective teaching and learning that result in student achievement. Therefore, the River City District believes it must mandate and direct school-based reforms and initiatives. Faculty, staff and students of Riverside interpret imposed reforms or initiatives as a way to fix them or
their practices, which are perceived to be deficient. Additionally the Riverside teachers and students are not trusted to reflect upon and alter ideas or practices that are deemed ineffective through measured results.

**Conflict Between Standardization and Differentiation**

Bureaucracy demands standardization. Bureaucratic tenets include efficiency components indicative of one-size-fits-all model (Rothschild, 1984). Riverside administrators and leadership team members shared a belief that consistency of reforms, interventions, curriculum, and resources necessary to address school and district improvement offer equity and equality of services and programs to all students of the River City Schools. Further, Riverside administrators and Leadership Team members explained that the sheer size of the district with its tens-of-thousands-of students and 100 schools it is important for standardization protocols resulting in consistency and efficiency. On the other hand, Riverside High School educators talked about standardized curriculum, prescribed and canned strategies, and pacing guides as confining and inconsiderate of learners’ needs. Further, standardization is incompatible with project-based learning that educators believe is engaging and relevant to students (Daniels, Bizar, & Zemelman, 2001). Differentiation is an initiative mentioned by educators or Riverside as an intervention to improve student learning. Individualization or differentiation of instruction is time-consuming and difficult to manage according to several study participants, while offering a more meaningful learning experience for students (Valli & Buese, 2007).

**Summary of Conclusions**

Contextual perspectives may be used to examine an organization as a social structure, a culture, a physical structure, a technology, or a part of the environment (Clark, Hatch,
Hawley & Hawley, Murphy and Meyers). The preponderance of evidence collected about what is occurring at Riverside under the influence of federal a state accountability policy reflects principles of scientific management and tenets of bureaucracy (Taylor, Weber, Callahan). Principles of scientific management and tenets of bureaucracy align with accountability policy all of which are in direct conflict with beliefs of effective teaching and student learning. Broad conclusions indicate many mismatches or discrepancies between the values of principals, Leadership Team members, teachers, and students about effective teaching and learning, and reality stemming from imposed mandates in the form of accountability policy.

An examination of the findings suggest answers to the research questions while identifying seven broad conclusions: First, the district and school organization’s scientifically managed and bureaucratic structures, policies, and programs influence the views, actions, and experiences of the school’s stakeholders and therefore help to establish the culture. Second, labels placed upon the school can be deflating and at the same time viewed as a challenge to prove one’s worth, or the value of the school organization. Third, school reform is perceived as necessary to bring about sustained change resulting in increased student achievement, although not fully realized. Fourth, accountability is equated with responsibility to do one’s job, while measured success is established through standardized test scores. Fifth, effective teaching is standards-based, engaging, and demonstrates relevancy, but difficult to implement under the current accountability system that equates testing and learning. Sixth, learning is defined as the ability to apply knowledge and at the same time primarily measured through standardized, objective tests. And last, but perhaps the most important, establishing
relationships and connections among all stakeholders of the organization are essential to effective teaching and learning.

Implications for Policy and Practice

Implications of the findings and conclusions are shared in this section. This study suggests implications for educational accountability policy, and educational practice.

Policy shapes or influences the culture of an organization as governments enact them with an eye to solving some problem or ideal (Marshall & Gerstl-Pepin, 2005). Educational accountability policy has reached tremendous proportions in its influence on teaching and learning in schools across the United States (Sunderman et al., 2005). Riverside High School educators and students indicated that NCLB has influenced the teaching and learning experiences in their school identified for improvement. Although Riverside is a single case of an urban high school struggling to meet benchmarks outlined in the law, there are several implications for policy and practice to be learned from their experiences.

As NCLB moved into a holding pattern when its reauthorization date of 2007 came and went without legislative action, the country’s schools continue to operate under guidance approved in 2001 and implemented in 2002. After the presidential elections of 2008, there is speculation the law will be up for reauthorization in some iteration that will include revisions recommended from various studies (Schoen & Fusarelli, 2008; Sunderman et al., 2005; The Commission on No Child Left Behind, 2007). It is therefore important that educators, patrons of America’s schools reflect on the progress made toward the law’s ambitious goals. In the reflective process, it is important to look at the aims of education or the question, ‘what is it that is expected of our schooling process?’ Determination of core values will guide the redesign of policy to achieve established goals. NCLB already provides an accountability
component (assessments, adequate yearly progress reports, and school report cards) that uses a mechanism for noneducators to easily monitor progress toward goal acquisition. It is the goals themselves and the underlying assumptions about effective teaching and learning that should be examined.

Moving from a Culture of Bureaucracy to a Culture of Collaboration

A school or school district identified for improvement under NCLB is especially vulnerable to mandates imposed from the federal and state levels. Districts and schools under improvement typically respond bureaucratically to these mandates by imposing reforms and initiatives and tightening controls, as the school or district identified is believed to be in need of “fixing.” Instead of focusing on externally imposed mandates in order to fix what is believed to be wrong with schools, districts and schools would benefit from reforms that are initiated from the bottom (building level) and supported and guided from the top (district level). Researchers of school reform (Murphy & Meyers, 2008; Uline, Tshannen-Moran, & Perez, 2003) have argued that the most effective reforms come about from first identifying the problem and then using a bottom-up and top-down collaborative process to identify possible interventions.

It is important for district and school administrators and reformers to understand that a one-size-fits all plan for reforming high schools does not exist. As was demonstrated in this case, Riverside High School’s career-focused academies already formed the foundation for the school’s reform efforts. All other reforms and initiatives should cohere around the career-focused academies. Rather than adopting multiple and seemingly disparate reform efforts, schools and districts would be better off empowering each school to adopt fewer reforms and develop a cohesive, school-based reform premised on the needs of its student population.
Teachers and students should not only have input, but should be involved in the development and decision-making about teaching and learning at the school. Empowering teachers and treating them like professionals might help attract and retain quality personnel and help current teachers feel more valued and less like factory workers.

To accomplish this will mean administrators will have to trust teachers and students to make good decisions and to provide the time for them to truly participate in collaborative arrangements such as PLCs. The concept of PLC has the potential to serve as the structure for collaboration and to bring coherence to all reform efforts and strategies for teaching and learning.

*Teaching and Learning: Building on Relationship, Relevance, and Rigor*

Accountability has placed a major focus on assessment, which has forced curriculum and instruction to align with state standards. Even when NCLB is eventually reauthorized, standardized assessment is still likely to be a cornerstone of the policy. However districts and schools do not have to limit their curriculum to standards or instructional strategies to those that are believed to maximize test scores. At Riverside High School, learning was often equated with assessment results, however, educators and students did not want to reduce teaching and learning to narrow curriculum, pacing guides, and standardized assessments.

Relationships, relevance, and rigor were the core values underlying what all study participants envisioned for Riverside High School, but felt constrained to fully embrace them. Building upon these core values as they relate to teaching and learning will require educators to transcend the standardized curriculum and assessments and not rely solely on a single test score to judge students’ success or failure. Multiple kinds of authentic assessments are needed to supplement standardized test results. Portfolios, performance, and projects are
examples of authentic assessments aligned with Casas’ (2003) work on authentic assessment. She suggests that learning is determined through authentic assessments that provide for demonstrations and verbal or written expression, which will require a different way of teaching.

Differentiating instruction personalizes the learning experience and going beyond the standards engages students in the learning process. Interdisciplinary lessons and activities connected to students’ current backgrounds and future work aspiration will also engage teachers and students more deeply. Additionally, research suggests teachers who display an enthusiasm and passion for learning and in particular their discipline, will generate a desire and greater curiosity for learning on the part of their students (Ancess, 2000; Ben-Peretz, 2001; National Research Council & Institute of Medicine, 2004). One of the greatest influences on student learning is a caring teacher, which reinforces the importance relationships (Noddings, 1984, 2003; Oakes et al., 2002; Reeves, 2004).

Project-based, hands on, experiential learning in and out of the classroom combined with high standards opens up more options for career exploration, but does not exclude higher education for those students who wish to pursue that route. While these approaches take time and effort to develop and are not easily measured, this is a way to engage students.

Studies around the world clearly indicate that learning is more than rote memorization. The National Research Council and Institute of Medicine (2004) found that students are engaged in learning and more likely to show academic achievement when choices are provided for them and teachers make the curriculum and instruction relevant to adolescents’ experiences, cultures, and long-term goals, so that they see some value in what they are asked to learn.
Considerations for the Future

Reconsidering the meaning of AYP. Revising NCLB could do much to reduce the fear factor in schools and promote greater innovation and more individualized approaches to student learning. Specifically, there is a need to reexamine the way AYP is defined and measured. Currently, the data are aggregated at the grade or course level and one group’s scores are compared to the scores of the students who took the test the previous year. This places the focus on the school faculty and how they perform from year to year.

A better approach would be to focus on student learning by implementing a student tracking approach and redefining AYP as the progress or growth students make from one year to the next in core content areas. The obvious difficulty of this growth or valued added model is the lack of continuity in subjects studied from year to year, especially at the high school level.

Designing better tests. NCLB should incorporate language that forces a critical analysis of the type of assessments currently used by states to measure student learning. This gets back to the question of what type of knowledge or skills are valued in society. Currently, most tests used today focus on a mastery of preset content. Questions arise. Is there an identifiable set of facts students need to know to be successful in the 21st Century? Or, would the better approach to assessment of learning be to focus on accessing and applying information to solve complex problems? Rather than structuring accountability around how well schools get students to master tested content, a new improved version of school accountability could focus on how well schools are able to spark in-depth thought and focused action.
The re-evaluation of assessments to support greater innovation is a primary recommendation of career and technical education field and the business and industry field. Proponents believe that the result will be more engaging classroom approaches because teachers are allowed to utilize professional judgment and are not threatened by pacing guides, skills lists, and pressure to “teach to the test.” More imaginative and integrated instructional practices will promote the type of divergent and analytical thinking needed for success in the 21st Century. More constructivist practices in the classroom will also address a number of issues faced by education such as student apathy, discipline, and drop out rates. Students become more connected to the learning, they see why it is needed, and find the learning process more interesting, challenging, and less threatening. Similar benefits might be expected in teachers, including greater enthusiasm for their work, less absenteeism, and less staff turnover.

Student achievement is a major national issue for public school reform. The NCLB act has utilized state accountability systems to force public schools to focus on achievement outcomes for all students. At no time in the history of public education has a federal law achieved such widespread notoriety. The NCLB Act may be a catalyst needed to pressure educators to become future thinkers and planners so that students may be prepared for jobs and careers that may not even exist yet. What is important to consider is the influence current policy is having on teaching and learning, and whether or not our schools are addressing what is important for the future of our youth. As NCLB is debated and considered for reauthorization, studies like the one at Riverside High School provide the actual experiences of teaching and learning under the influence of accountability policy—important data for
law-makers, educators, and the public as a whole to have when deciding guidance for education.
REFERENCES
LIST OF REFERENCES


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No Child Left Behind Act, 115 STAT. 1425 § (2002).


APPENDICES
Appendix A

Volunteer Participant Questionnaire

Department of Educational Leadership

Wichita State University

March 2007

My name is Diane Gross and I am a doctoral student at Wichita State University in the Educational Leadership Program. I am seeking potential participants for my dissertation research, which is to examine the influence of federal and state accountability policy on the values, beliefs, and attitudes of educators and students about teaching and learning in an urban high school identified for improvement. In order to help me identify participants for the study, I have developed a questionnaire that will allow me to select a representative sample of the West High Staff—one that encompasses administrators and classroom teachers. I would like to have teachers who are tenured as well as non-tenured, teachers from the various academies, teachers with experience in administration of the state assessments, teachers from ethnically diverse backgrounds, teachers who are male and female, teachers of regular education students and teachers of special needs students, teachers of core curricular courses, and teachers of elective courses, and, especially important, educators who are willing to volunteer their time.
The information shared in your responses to the questions in no way obligates you to participate any further, but simply provides information to aid me in the selection process. All information will remain confidential and you will not be personally identified other than as a potential participant in this study. Even if selected as a participant, all information will be held in confidence and you will not be personally identified in the final report.

Please respond to the following prompts or questions:

1. Name:

2. Race:

3. Gender:

4. Teaching Assignment (Subject and Grade Level):

5. Years of Experience:

6. Number of Years at West High School?

7. Have federal or state policies influenced your work? If so, briefly explain in what way your work has been influenced.

8. Have you had the experience of administering a state assessment?

9. Are you willing to commit to an hour-long focus group interview at a mutually convenient time?
10. Are you willing to commit to an hour-long individual interview at a mutually convenient time?

11. Would you be willing to allow classroom observations scheduled at intervals over the course of the spring semester?

12. Would you be willing to commit to an electronic conversation/interview if a face-to-face meeting cannot be arranged (allow for up to an hour of time)?

Contact information:

Work Telephone – Home Telephone –

Work email – Home email –
Appendix B

Student Focus Group Protocol

Hello, my name is Diane Gross. I am a doctoral student at Wichita State University in the Educational Leadership Program. I work in the Haysville School District as the assistant superintendent for instructional services. I appreciate your willingness to help with my research efforts. I am working in collaboration with Wichita West High School administration as well as the administrators from the district office of the Wichita Public Schools (Assistant Superintendent for high schools and the Director of Learning Services) to examine the influence of federal and state education policy on the values, beliefs, and attitudes of educators and students about teaching and learning in one urban high school identified for improvement under the NCLB Act of 2001.

You were selected to participate in this interview or focus group because of your willingness to share your experiences with teaching and learning during the era of NCLB (in particular the accountability component of mandated testing). I want you to feel free to share your thoughts, opinions, and beliefs; after all I will examine your responses determine values, beliefs, and attitudes about schooling as influenced by federal and state education policy.

Before we begin, I would like to share a few procedures for this conversation. Although we will be on a first name basis today, no names will be used when I report the results of this session. You can be assured of complete confidentiality. With your permission I would like to audio-record our session today so that I will be able to more carefully listen to your ideas later. The tape will only be used for the purpose of note taking and will be destroyed following the completion of the study. This session will last approximately 60 minutes.
Questions

1. Please introduce yourself and tell me about your association with Wichita West High School (Grade level, academy, activities/organizations).

2. What is one thing that you like about Wichita West High School?
   i. On the other hand, what is one thing that you dislike about West High School and want to see changed?

3. What is it that you hope to gain by earning a high school diploma?

4. What are your goals for the future? Do you feel like you are prepared to pursue your goals?

5. What can you tell me about the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001?

6. What influence does education policy have on your school experience?

7. How do you describe effective teaching?
   a. In what class or course do you typically experience effective teaching? Can you describe a particular lesson that fits your description?
   b. What facilitates effective teaching?
   c. What gets in the way of effective teaching?

8. How do you describe learning?

9. How is learning measured? Or, How do you know if you have learned something?

10. Who makes decisions about education policies? How are decisions about educational practice made?

   How might you describe your ideal high school? How might it be structured? What would it look like? What might it sound like? Where might it be?
Hello, my name is Diane Gross. I am a doctoral student at Wichita State University in the Educational Leadership Program. I work in the Haysville School District as the assistant superintendent for instructional services. I appreciate your willingness to help with my research efforts. I am working in collaboration with Wichita West High School administration as well as the administrators from the district office of the Wichita Public Schools (Assistant Superintendent for high schools and the Director of Learning Services) to examine the influence of federal and state education policy on the values, beliefs, and attitudes of educators and students about teaching and learning in one urban high school identified for improvement under the NCLB Act of 2001.

You were selected to participate in this interview or focus group because of your willingness to share your experiences with teaching and learning during the era of NCLB (in particular the accountability component of mandated testing). I want you to feel free to share your thoughts, opinions, and beliefs; after all I will examine your responses determine values, beliefs, and attitudes about schooling as influenced by federal and state education policy.

Before we begin, I would like to share a few procedures for this conversation. Although we will be on a first name basis today, no names will be used when I report the results of this session. You can be assured of complete confidentiality. With your permission I would like to audio-record our session today so that I will be able to more carefully listen to your ideas later. The tape will only be used for the purpose of note taking and will be destroyed following the completion of the study. This session will last approximately 60 minutes.
Questions

Please introduce yourself and tell me about your association with Wichita West High School.

1. What is one thing that you like about Wichita West High School?
   a. On the other hand, what is one thing that you dislike about West High School and would like to see changed?

2. What can you tell me about the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001?

3. What influence does education policy have on your teaching practice?

4. How do you describe effective teaching?
   a. Can you describe a particular lesson that fits your description?
   b. What facilitates effective teaching?
   c. What gets in the way of effective teaching?

5. How do you describe learning?

6. How is learning measured? Or, How do you know if learning has occurred?

7. Who makes decisions about education policies? How are decisions about educational practice made?

8. How might you describe your ideal high school? How might it be structured? What would it look like? What might it sound like? Where might it be? Consider time and resources ....
Hello, my name is Diane Gross. I am a doctoral student at Wichita State University in the Educational Leadership Program. I work in the Haysville School District as the assistant superintendent for instructional services. I appreciate your willingness to help with my research efforts. I am working in collaboration with Wichita West High School administration as well as the administrators from the district office of the Wichita Public Schools (assistant superintendent for high schools and the director of learning services) to examine the influence of federal and state education policy on the values, beliefs, and attitudes of educators and students about teaching and learning in one urban high school identified for improvement under the NCLB Act of 2001.

You were selected to participate in this interview or focus group because of your willingness to share your experiences with teaching and learning during the era of NCLB (in particular the accountability component of mandated testing). I want you to feel free to share your thoughts, opinions, and beliefs; after all I will examine your responses determine values, beliefs, and attitudes about schooling as influenced by federal and state education policy.

Before we begin, I would like to share a few procedures for this conversation. Although we will be on a first name basis today, no names will be used when I report the results of this session. You can be assured of complete confidentiality. With your permission I would like to audio-record our session today so that I will be able to more carefully listen to your ideas later. The tape will only be used for the purpose of note taking and will be destroyed following the completion of the study. This session will last approximately 60 minutes.
Questions

1. Please introduce yourself and tell me about your association with Wichita West High School.

2. What is one thing that you like about Wichita West High School?
On the other hand, what is one thing that you dislike about West High School?

3. How might you describe the purpose of high school? Or, What is that you hope to gain by earning a high school diploma?

4. What are your goals for the future? Do you feel like you are prepared to pursue your goals?
Or, Would explain how you prepare students for their future?

5. What can you tell me about the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001?

6. What influence does education policy have on your school experience? Or, on your teaching practice?

7. How do you describe effective teaching?

   a. In what class or course do you typically experience effective teaching?

      Can you describe a particular lesson that fits your description?

8. How do you describe learning?

9. How is learning measured? Or, How do you know if learning has occurred?

10. Who makes decisions about education policies? How are decisions about educational practice made?
11. How might you describe your ideal high school? How might it be structured? What would it look like? What might it sound like? Where might it be? Consider time and resources ....
Appendix E

Educator Individual Interview Protocol

Hello, you may or may not remember me. My name is Diane Gross, a doctoral student at Wichita State University in the Educational Leadership Program. I appreciate your willingness to help with my research efforts. I am working in collaboration with Wichita West High School administration as well as the administrators from the district office of the Wichita Public Schools (Assistant Superintendent for high schools and the Director of Learning Services) to examine the influences of federal and state accountability policy on the values, beliefs, and attitudes of educators and students about teaching and learning in one urban high school identified for improvement under the NCLB Act of 2001.

You were selected to participate in this individual interview because of your willingness to share your experiences with teaching and learning during an era of accountability (in particular NCLB). I want you to feel free to share your thoughts, opinions, and beliefs; after all I will examine your responses to determine values, beliefs, and attitudes about schooling as influenced by federal and state accountability policy.

Before we begin, I would like to share a few procedures for this conversation. Although we will be on a first name basis today, no names will be used when I report the results of this session. You can be assured of complete confidentiality. With your permission I would like to audio-record our session today so that I will be able to more carefully listen to your ideas later. The recording will only be used for the purpose of note taking and will be destroyed following the completion of the study. This session will last approximately 60 minutes.

Questions
1. Please introduce yourself and tell me about your association with Wichita West High School.

2. The last time we visited about teaching and learning at West High School, you mentioned _____________________ and ________________,
   • Who controls the teaching and learning experience? How so?
   • How is learning measured? Is learning accurately represented through such measures?
   • How would you describe what you teach?
   • Based upon students’ goals and desires for the future, do you feel as if what happens in the classroom is preparing them to attain their goals? What can be done to better prepare students for the future?
   • What is different about teaching and learning since the implementation of NCLB?

(The questions listed are simply examples of probing questions that might be used to explore further the initial responses of some students who presented information that warranted additional questions to understand the culture of the school.)
Appendix F

Student Individual Interview Protocol

Hello, you may or may not remember me. My name is Diane Gross, a doctoral student at Wichita State University in the Educational Leadership Program. I appreciate your willingness to help with my research efforts. I am working in collaboration with Wichita West High School administration as well as the administrators from the district office of the Wichita Public Schools (Assistant Superintendent for high schools and the Director of Learning Services) to examine the influences of federal and state accountability policy on the values, beliefs, and attitudes of educators and students about teaching and learning in one urban high school identified for improvement under the NCLB Act of 2001.

You were selected to participate in this individual interview because of your willingness to share your experiences with teaching and learning during an era of accountability (in particular NCLB). I want you to feel free to share your thoughts, opinions, and beliefs; after all I will examine your responses to determine values, beliefs, and attitudes about schooling as influenced by federal and state accountability policy.

Before we begin, I would like to share a few procedures for this conversation. Although we will be on a first name basis today, no names will be used when I report the results of this session. You can be assured of complete confidentiality. With your permission I would like to audio-record our session today so that I will be able to more carefully listen to your ideas later. The recording will only be used for the purpose of note taking and will be destroyed following the completion of the study. This session will last approximately 60 minutes.

Questions
3. Please introduce yourself and tell me about your association with Wichita West High School.

4. The last time we visited about teaching and learning at West High School, you mentioned ________________________ and ________________________.

   • Who controls the teaching and learning experience? How so?
   • How is learning measured? Is your learning accurately represented through such measures?
   • How would you describe what you are learning?
   • Based upon your goals and desires for the future, do you feel as if what happens in the classroom is preparing you to attain your goals?
   • What is different about teaching and learning since the implementation of NCLB?

(The questions listed are simply examples of probing questions that might be used to explore further the initial responses of some students who presented information that warranted additional questions to understand the culture of the school.)
Appendix G
Adult Student Consent

Dear Wichita West High School Adult Student:

I am a doctoral student at Wichita State University in the Educational Leadership Program. I am conducting research at Wichita West High School that examines the influence of federal and state accountability policies on the values, beliefs, and attitudes of educators and students in an urban high school identified for improvement under the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. Your participation will consist of a focus group interview and possibly a follow-up personal interview, each of which will last no longer than 60 minutes and will be held at a time and in a location that is mutually convenient. Results of this study will be shared with the West High School administration, the district assistant superintendent for high schools, and others designated by the West High School administration for the purpose of informing future decisions about teaching and learning in the urban high school setting. Findings from this research may be presented at regional, national, or international conferences and may result in publication in scholarly journals.

Your focus group interview and personal interview will remain confidential and you will not be personally identified in the final report. With your agreement, both interviews will be audio-recorded to assist me with accurately describing your responses. To insure accuracy, I will summarize your responses at the conclusion of your focus group interview and give you an opportunity to review the transcript of your individual interview.

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you are under no obligation to participate. Your decision not to participate will not affect your future relations with Wichita West High School or Wichita State University (WSU). If you have questions please contact my advisor, Dr. Jean Patterson at WSU at 316-978-6392. If you have any questions pertaining to your rights as a research participant, you can contact the Office of Research Administration at Wichita State University, Wichita, Kansas, 67260-0007, telephone 316-978-3285.

By signing one copy of this form you are granting permission to participate in this interview. You are welcome to keep a copy of the form. Your signature indicates that you have read the information provided above and voluntarily agree to participate in the study. You may also withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or fear of reprisal. Thank you for assisting me in this important study.

Respectfully,
Diane Gross, WSU Doctoral Student

I agree to participate in an interview for the WSU research study.

____________________________
Adult Student Signature

____________________________
Date
Appendix H

Parent Consent / Student Assent

Department of Educational Leadership
Wichita State University
March 2007

Dear Wichita West High School Parent/Guardian,

I am a doctoral student at Wichita State University in the Educational Leadership Program. I am conducting research at Wichita West High School that examines the influence of federal and state accountability policies on the values, beliefs, and attitudes of educators and students in an urban high school identified for improvement under the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. Your participation will consist of a focus group interview and possibly a follow-up personal interview, each of which will last no longer than 60 minutes and will be held at a time and in a location that is mutually convenient. Results of this study will be shared with the West High School administration, the district assistant superintendent for high schools, and others designated by the West High School administration for the purpose of informing future decisions about teaching and learning in the urban high school setting. Findings from this research may be presented at regional, national, or international conferences and may result in publication in scholarly journals.

Your child’s focus group and individual interview responses will remain confidential and he/she will not be personally identified in the final report. With your agreement, the interview will be audio-recorded to assist the researcher in accurately describing the responses. To insure accuracy, the researcher will summarize the participants’ responses at the conclusion of the interview.

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary and the student is under no obligation to participate. The decision not to participate will not affect the students’ or guardians’ future relations with Wichita West High School or Wichita State University (WSU). If you have questions please contact my advisor, Dr. Jean Patterson at WSU at 316-978-6392. If you have any questions pertaining to rights as a research participant, you can contact the Office of Research Administration at Wichita State University, Wichita, Kansas, 67260-0007, telephone 316-978-3285.

By signing one copy of this form, the legal guardian is granting permission for a minor student to participate in this interview. The student signature indicates that you have read the information provided and voluntarily agree to participate in the study. You are welcome to keep a copy of the form. You may also withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or fear of reprisal. Thank you for assisting us in this important study.

Respectfully,
Diane Gross, WSU Doctoral Student
I consent to allow my child to participate in the WSU research study.

____________________________________________________________________
Parent/Guardian Signature

Date
Assent Form for Students Under 18

I have been informed that my parent(s) or guardian(s) have given permission for me to participate, if I want to, in a study about how principals, teachers, and students are affected by federal and state accountability policies. School. My participation in this research project is voluntary and I have been told that I may stop my participation at any time. If I choose not to participate, it will not affect my grades in any way.

___________________________________________________________________________
Student Signature

___________________________________________________________________________
Date
Appendix I

Educator / Adult Consent

Department of Educational Leadership
Wichita State University

March 2007

Dear Wichita West High School Educator,

I am a doctoral student at Wichita State University in the Educational Leadership Program. I am conducting research at Wichita West High School that examines the influence of federal and state accountability policies on the values, beliefs, and attitudes of educators and students in an urban high school identified for improvement under the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. Your participation will consist of a focus group interview and possibly a follow-up personal interview, each of which will last no longer than 60 minutes and will be held at a time and in a location that is mutually convenient. Results of this study will be shared with the West High School administration, the district assistant superintendent for high schools, and others designated by the West High School administration for the purpose of informing future decisions about teaching and learning in the urban high school setting. Findings from this research may be presented at regional, national, or international conferences and may result in publication in scholarly journals.

Your focus group interview and personal interview will remain confidential and you will not be personally identified in the final report. With your agreement, both interviews will be audio-recorded to assist me with accurately describing your responses. To insure accuracy, I will summarize your responses at the conclusion of your focus group interview and give you an opportunity to review the transcript of your individual interview.

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you are under no obligation to participate. Your decision not to participate will not affect your future relations with Wichita West High School or Wichita State University (WSU). If you have questions please contact my advisor, Dr. Jean Patterson at WSU at 316-978-6392. If you have any questions pertaining to your rights as a research participant, you can contact the Office of Research Administration at Wichita State University, Wichita, Kansas, 67260-0007, telephone 316-978-3285.

By signing one copy of this form you are granting permission to participate in this interview. You are welcome to keep a copy of the form. Your signature indicates that you have read the information provided above and voluntarily agree to participate in the study. You may also withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or fear of reprisal. Thank you for assisting me in this important study.

Respectfully,
Diane Gross, WSU Doctoral Student

I agree to participate in an interview for the WSU research study.

Educator Signature

Date