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# Portraiture of Rural Pennsylvania Elementary School Administrators Implementing the Mandates of the No Child Left Behind Act within the Context of a Reading Program

Linda D. Dobbie  
*Indiana University of Pennsylvania*

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PORTRAITURE OF RURAL PENNSYLVANIA ELEMENTARY SCHOOL  
ADMINISTRATORS IMPLEMENTING THE MANDATES OF THE NO CHILD  
LEFT BEHIND ACT WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF A READING PROGRAM

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Linda D. Dobbie

Indiana University of Pennsylvania

May 2010

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Indiana University of Pennsylvania  
The School of Graduate Studies and Research  
Department of Professional Studies in Education

We hereby approve the dissertation of

Linda D. Dobbie

Candidate for the degree of Doctor of Education

---

Cathy C. Kaufman, Ph.D.  
Professor of Professional Studies in Education  
Chairperson

---

Robert E. Millward, D.Ed  
Professor of Professional Studies in Education

---

Joseph F. Marcoline, D.Ed  
Professor of Professional Studies in Education

ACCEPTED

---

Timothy P. Mack, Ph.D.  
Dean  
The School of Graduate Studies and Research

Title: Portraiture of Rural Pennsylvania Elementary School Administrators Implementing the Mandates of the No Child Left Behind Act within the Context of a Reading Program

Author: Linda D. Dobbie

Dissertation Chair: Dr. Cathy C. Kaufman

Dissertation Committee Members: Dr. Robert E. Millward  
Dr. Joseph F. Marcoline

The signing of the No Child Left Behind Act in 2002 has created "potholes" for elementary school administrators as they seek to make Adequate Yearly Progress on the Pennsylvania School System Assessment (PSSA). This study includes three rural Pennsylvania elementary school administrators implementing the mandates of the No Child Left Behind Act.

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine what accounts for the success of these rural school administrators who have limited resources. This study sought to understand the factors that contributed to or challenged the implementation of the mandated legislation. The beliefs and interview dialogue of the administrators and teachers provided information to determine "why" the rural schools made continual Adequate Yearly Progress and what accounted for the success of student achievement on the PSSA test.

The research study concluded that organizational change and individual leadership change were the key ingredients for increased student success in a balanced literacy program. The administrators were creative in making system changes and became transformational leaders in their buildings. The research concluded a gap exists at the secondary level and further study at that level is advised.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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To my husband, Bob, who stood beside me through the long nights of studying and writing, I owe my deepest love and admiration. To my daughters, Krista and Karyn, who often endured a mom away from home, but willingly conducted themselves responsibly and with respect, I will love you forever.

*The glory of friendship is not in the outstretched hand, nor the kindly smile, nor  
the joy of companionship;  
It is in the spiritual inspiration that comes to one when she discovers that  
someone else believes in her and is willing to trust her.*

*Ralph Waldo Emerson*

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## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **BACKGROUND**

In the shadow of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001, accountability and student proficiency on the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) is in the forefront of curriculum and instruction and staff development. School administrators have a heightened awareness of changes in leadership practices and changes being made to the school organization due to trying to achieve Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) as it is defined by PSSA. Not scoring well or not meeting the yearly targets established by the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) labels a school as in need of improvement. The label sends a negative message to the community that the teachers and the school are not meeting the needs of all students when in fact the opposite may be true due to disaggregation of sub-group scores.

The introduction to the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 states, “The purpose of the No Child Left Behind Act is to close the achievement gap with accountability, flexibility, and choice so that no child is left behind” (NCLB, 2002). This law takes aim at improving overall student performance and closing the achievement gap of disadvantaged students. There are a number of positive goals embedded in this law such as: the requirement for a strong accountability system, highly qualified teachers, high quality academic programs and instruction, parent involvement and supplemental services for students and schools that fail to make progress. Governor Richardson of New Mexico and Governor Martz of Montana feel the NCLB Act is “well-intentioned” as mentioned

in Bracey (2003). NCLB received bipartisan support and was voted into law by both the House and Senate in October 2001. On the surface, the implementation of NCLB appears to have been enacted for the betterment of all students.

NCLB is perceived as a law with positive outcomes. However, good the intentions of the law, the reality of interpreting, implementing, and financing, the attached mandates are proving to be a struggle for rural school administrators (Whitaker, 2003). Particularly, in rural settings, where Pennsylvania ranks in the top ten of rural states, the struggle is caused by a lower tax base, fewer resources, isolation, and higher teacher attrition rates. This study to gives insight into changing roles of administrators as they implement NCLB policy and mandates.

The policy of NCLB 2001 is to close the achievement gap of disadvantaged students, is seen as regulatory (Fowler, 2000) in nature with the intention of school reform and equity for all students. The law includes the old concepts of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) 1965, 1988 and the Improving Americas School Act (IASA) 1994 for regulating literacy instruction such as who is served, standardized testing, and how reading is taught, but takes on an aggressive demeanor with consequences to those schools that do not make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). NCLB is “a rather simplistic law, in relation to its notions of the causes of poverty and failure. This law calls for all children to learn no matter the difference – the individual who

does not act as a problem solver is inscribed as *the child left behind*" (Popkewitz, 2004).

NCLB is an extension of IASA 1994 with many new obligations placed on local school districts and expands the federal government's role in public education. The new Act affects all public schools. Some changes from ESEA to NCLB include: school choice, standardized assessment in grades 3-8 & 11; school-wide Adequate Yearly Progress with all student subgroups (ESL, low income, students with disabilities, major racial and ethnic groups disaggregated; Title I aides with associate degrees or proficient on a state test; mandated hiring of English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers, and the list goes on.

School improvement in the areas of reading and math have centered on curriculum standards (Ravitch, 1995) and focuses on what serves as curriculum content and who are served or hindered by that content (Boeler, 2000). Modern schooling has continually linked the individual to narratives of social/economic progress, the revitalization of democracy and personal betterment (Meyer, Boli, Thomas & Ramirez, 1997). NCLB carries the resonance of a positive outcome for its citizenry as its policy content implies that all children will be proficient by 2014 no matter what their ability level and will make able and worthy contributions on a global scale.

NCLB requires that state assessments include all students; even those students with limited English proficiency and disabilities. However, PSSA does allow for testing accommodations if normally used during classroom instruction. Related to state assessments is the issue of Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP).

The states must define AYP using the criteria of proficient test scores and other criteria such as, graduation rates, participation in testing, and attendance (Paige, 2002). For schools to reach the defined level of proficiency by 2014, scores must increase by prescribed percentages each year (Olson, 2003). The school administrators mentioned above, along with central office administrators, are faced with interpreting the meaning of AYP and how it affects school management, curriculum, and pedagogy.

The policy of reform and regulation found in NCLB is complicated, not easily implemented, and intersects curriculum, pedagogy, and school management at the local level. Whereby NCLB through the PSSA assessment demands certain content knowledge, teaching strategies and degrees of proficiency, demands are changing the roles of school administrators. These role changes include site-based management, pressure from high stakes testing and accountability, school choice, relationships with staff and community, and overall decision-making (Whitaker, 2003; Williams & Portin, 1997). "Overall workloads are contributing to increased role changes and stress," (Whitaker, 2003).

### **Statement of the Problem**

In a stark contrast to the introduction of NCLB to allow flexibility, administrators perceive a contrasting view of flexibility, a lack of local voice, and unfunded mandates. In other words, the centralized control attached to NCLB has grounded school administrators in an unfortunate situation and is causing problems for the schools and the community. Edmondson (2000) discusses



centralized control as “taking the power of the people one step away.” Popkewitz (2004) refers to the centralizing school management found in the NCLB policy as designed to increase efficacy and efficiency through assessment. NCLB does engage efficacy or substantial power over schools through centralization of curriculum, attendance, graduation rates, and AYP.

Although education policymakers value efficiency through regulation (Wirt & Kirst, 1989), centralization through NCLB is problematic for school administrators. For example, the law requires that districts provide school choice to parents under school improvement, but does not provide adequate funding for implementation. The Bush administration valued centralized curricular goals and control to reach those goals in order to leave no child behind. NCLB makes the assumption that centralized policy is the primary need to produce proficient students by 2014 and an efficient citizenry.

To gather essential data to further the understanding of the implementation of NCLB, it is necessary to view the centralization impact of NCLB and its implications for rural Pennsylvania school administrators.

Kaestle and Smith (1982), suggest one of the central dynamics of American educational history is the long-range trend for local and parental schooling arrangements to increasing government funding and centralized control.

The federal law demands that states set specific assessment goals for schools, with consequences to those schools, if adequate yearly goals are not achieved. The spiral of consequences for not achieving state goals could include

loss of federal dollars, school improvement, termination of faculty and administrators, restructuring and privatization (NCLB, 2002).

NCLB expands the federal government's role in public education by mandated annual standardized testing in reading and math in grades 3-8 and 11 [Sec. 1111(A) (v) (I), NCLB], mandated hiring of English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers and highly qualified teachers, requiring an Annual Report Card be published by local education agencies (LEAs) [Sec.1114. (h) (1) (A)], school-wide Adequate Yearly Progress with all student subgroups (ESL, low income, students with disabilities, major racial and ethnic groups) disaggregated progress [Sec. 1111(B) (bb)], Title I aides with associate degrees or proficiency on a state test.

The stream of educational decision-making (centralization) now flows from the federal government to states, then to districts, schools, and finally classrooms through the enactment of NCLB. The federal law demands that states set specific assessment goals for schools with consequences to those schools if goals are not achieved.

One way to explain centralization is that purposive-rationality sets up a bureaucratic authority and that bureaucratic authority happens over time as officials attempt to make schools more efficient. Bureaucratic authority is described by Max Weber as cited in Heydebrand (1994), as a sphere of public-legal authority or the bureaucratic agent that observes areas of jurisdiction, which are generally ordered by rules or laws and the authority to issue or carry out rules. Within Weber's framework of legitimate authority, the agents in power define rules, create laws, and oversee the implementation of those rules and

laws based on the theory of rational character, whereby it is the right of those empowered to exercise authority.

Weber's purposive-rationality weighs the costs and consequences of our actions and implementation of decisions based on formal criteria of efficiency and cost-benefit analysis (Heydebrand, 1994). In other words, purposive-rationality searches for the most efficient economical and technical means to achieve goals.

In a substantive policy, purposive-rationality or a means-end rationality may come to dominate the content of the policy. Purposive-rationality is, according to Weber, the dominant basis of conduct in modern society, and there are many examples of this in the NCLB act.

One example of purposive-rationality in NCLB is seen in the Sec. 1114, Accountability that describes AYP. Schools are required to become 'efficient' in a prescribed amount of time [to achieve academic proficiency by 2014] or are subject to a variety of consequences; one of which is the possible loss of federal funds. Bureaucratic authority in this example uses purposive-rationality to centralize control in schools. NCLB also uses the efficacy of the policy to reach such goals.

The centralization of NCLB expects all students to be proficient on Pennsylvania Academic Standards and all schools to perform to the targets set by the Pennsylvania Department of Education. This 'one size fits all' mentality does not fit a socially and culturally diverse school district because each local community expresses varied needs for academic growth of its students. For public school administrators, NCLB is causing problems with staffing, curriculum,

materials, finances, and assessment (Bracey, 2003). To this end, organizational change is an occurrence faced by all rural Pennsylvania administrators.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to examine the individual and organizational changes experienced by elementary school administrators under the implication of the No Child Left Behind Act in schools making Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). The mandates connected with NCLB have an impact on both elementary and secondary schools with obstacles for rural Pennsylvania administrators. In this study, the researcher attempted to convey the implications of NCLB on rural school administrators as they go through administrative and organizational change to comply with and implement the law.

The formidable consequences tied to not making AYP, such as school improvement, school restructuring, or privatization, hang over the heads of the administrators and staff as they strive for proficiency to let no child behind. Governors Richardson and Martz (2003) state in a letter to Rod Paige (previous USDE Secretary), “As we work to implement this complex, sweeping legislation...we remain with the impression that NCLB and its accompanying rules contain expectations that create difficulties in providing quality educational services in rural states...”

Four years after the initiation of the NCLB law, several studies have investigated the changing roles of school administrators (Halverson, Grigg, Prichett, & Thomas, 2005; Jackson, 2000; King, 2002; MacBeath, 2003; Whitaker, 2003) with varying results.

While Porterfield (2006) researched the implication of NCLB on teachers and Mitchell (2004) researched the implication of NCLB on parents, this case study sought to fill a gap by adding to the current research by exploring the implication of NCLB on principals. The data gathered from this study will benefit school administrators as they interpret and implement educational policy and provide effective leadership in schools.

Individual leadership and organizational change theories serve as the foundation for this qualitative study. The study examined the implications of NCLB policy on three school administrators from three different rural Pennsylvania school districts.

Although NCLB has served as a catalyst for changed teaching practice and changed community relations, few studies address the impact of this policy on elementary school administrators. The findings from this study will be of interest to other administrators who are faced with the implementation of NCLB and perhaps see common threads with their own experience. In addition, information gained through this study may assist other school administrators through the change process and the implementation of NCLB. The analysis of the findings of this study may also give insight to those in higher education who prepare and train future administrators for public education.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The framework for this qualitative case study is grounded in both organizational change theory (Kotter, 2002; Schlechty, 2005; Senge, 2000) and individual change theory (Bridges, 2003; Evans, 1996; Hall & Hord, 2006).

Senge (1999) discusses the life cycle of organizational change initiatives and how multiple resources and expert advice will fail to bring about change. Rather the author states, “The sources for [change] lie in our most basic ways of thinking. If these do not change, any new “input” will end up producing the same fundamentally unproductive types of actions” (p.6). *Profound change* is a term coined by Senge, et al, to describe organizational change that combines inner shifts in people’s values, aspirations and behaviors with outer shifts in processes, strategies, practices and systems. The authors suggest, “In profound change there is learning. The organization does not just do something new; it builds its capacity for doing things in a new way- it builds its capacity for ongoing change” (Senge, 1999, p. 15).

Hall and Hord (2006) express patterns of change are evident along with the “potholes” that are encountered. While it is a wasted effort to dwell on the potholes, it is foolish to ignore them” (p. xii). It is the very “potholes” that the study will examine as administrators change roles under the mandates of NCLB and in dealing with staff, parents, students and the community.

### **Significance of the Study**

As AYP and a greater demand for accountability hover over the heads of rural public school administrators, there is a greater need to know and understand how mandated policy affects leadership, organizational change and what administrators do in the daily operations of the school. This study is timely in that the pressure for proficiency of all students is approaching the halfway mark. Jackson (2004), suggests the stakes for principal [administrator]

accountability relative to increased levels of student achievement are spelled out in the *No Child Left Behind Act* that mandates corrective action for schools that fail to make improvements. There is a need to understand the change process, of both the individual and the school organization that will benefit administrators, teachers and students for higher achievement and school improvement whenever possible.

While some studies relate the changing roles of the administrator, (Halverson, Grigg, Prichett, & Thomas, 2005); Jackson, 2000; King, 2002; MacBeath, 2003; Whitaker, 2003) these studies do not focus on the process of change to fulfill the new role. The perception of NCLB on teachers (Kelly, 2006; Murphy, 2008; & Panzica, 2008; Porterfield 2006) along with the perceptions of parents (Cavazos, 2007; Mitchell, 2003 & Simmons, 2007) have been previously studied. With the above studies as a foundation, it is necessary to research perceptions of the mandated policy of NCLB with elementary school administrators.

### **Research Questions**

During the course of this study, the following questions will guide the investigation.

Over arching question: What accounts for the success of schools meeting Adequate Yearly Progress?

1. What obstacles (potholes) do elementary school administrators face as they implement the NCLB law?

2. What is the transition experience of building administrators as they implement the tenets of NCLB?
3. What is the most dramatic change to administrative practice since the implementation to NCLB?
4. How do administrators adapt to increased mandates for accountability?
5. How is organizational change affected by the contextual mandates of NCLB?

### **Methodology**

The paradigm of qualitative research was chosen for this case study because it best suits the investigation of change in three rural Pennsylvania school districts. Creswell (1994) defines a qualitative study as an inquiry process of understanding a social or human problem, based on a complex holistic picture, formed with words, reporting detailed views of informants, and conducted in a natural setting” (p.1-2).

In a case study, Merriam (1988) suggests the study is an examination of a specific phenomenon such as a program, an event, a person, a process, an institution, or a social group. The author suggests:

A case study research design is similar to an architectural blueprint. It is a plan for assembling, organizing, and integrating information (data), and it results in a specific end product (research findings). The selection of a particular design is determined by how the problem is shaped, by the questions it raises, and by the type of end product desired (p. 6).



Smith, (1978) suggests the case is a bounded system or the focus of the investigation. Unlike quantitative or experimental research where variables are manipulated to investigate cause-and-effect relationships, this non-experimental or descriptive case study, characterizes something as it is. There is no manipulation of treatments or subjects; “the researcher takes things as they are” (McMillan and Schumacher, 1984, p.26). Also, in quantitative design, it is assumed that reality is objective; where as in a qualitative design, the researcher seeks to understand the phenomenon.

Gathering data will consist of a series of three interviews after the PSSA results have been returned to the schools in the district. Secondly, the researcher will analyze documents, memos, and faculty agendas concerning PSSA information that was created by the principals and distributed to the staff.

In this particular case study of three rural administrators in three different districts in Central Pennsylvania and nine teachers from the same districts, inductive research of the qualitative paradigm will allow for mutual simultaneous shaping of factors with emerging themes and categories that can then be coded (Lincoln and Guba, 1984; Miles and Huberman, 1994; Straus and Corbin, 1990). The codes are tags or labels for assigning units of meaning to the descriptive information compiled during the data collection process. Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest it is not the words themselves, but the meaning that matters. The codes can then be clustered as they relate to the various research questions allowing an organized frame for drawing conclusions.

While qualitative research can be supported by many researchers, the art of portraiture, an alternative method of qualitative research (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997), is the foundation for this case study. The author explains social science portraiture as a genre of inquiry and representation that seeks to join science and art. “The relationship between the two is rich with meaning and resonance and becomes the arena for navigating the empirical, aesthetic, and ethical dimensions of authentic and compelling narrative” (Lawrence-Lightfoot, p.xv).

There is some debate about case study and the traditional methods used to collect and analyze data. Porterfield (2006) suggests a common complaint about case studies is that it is difficult to generalize from one case to another. However, Yin (1994) suggests findings should be generalized to theory similar to the way scientists generalize experimental results to theory.

### **Population Information**

This case study includes three elementary principals and nine elementary teachers who are employed in three different rural Pennsylvania schools in south Central Pennsylvania. These school administrators have served at least two years in their current positions in the same building or district. The years of administrative and teaching experience ranges from five years to fifteen. The administrators were engaged in a series of interviews along with a third contact for follow-up or clarification of information. The rural school principals and teachers were chosen due to the rural status and similar demographics.

## Limitations

This case study is limited to three school districts in rural Central Pennsylvania. Also, the assessment data reviewed for student achievement is limited to reading scores on the Pennsylvania School System Assessment test. Since the pool of respondents in this study was limited to three rural school districts, the findings cannot be generalized to other school districts or those administrators represented in other school districts.

## Definitions of Terms

Annual Yearly Progress (AYP): Under the *No Child Left Behind Act*, every state was required to construct an assessment to measure student achievement in math and reading along with criteria for attendance, graduation rate, and participation in the yearly assessment. In Pennsylvania, an individual school must have at least a 95% attendance. Graduation rate is set at 85% and test participation rate is set at 95%. Performance targets for math and reading follow a spiraling scale that must be met year to meet AYP.

No Child Left Behind Act: This education policy was initiated in 2001 and is the most radical school reform policy since the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 under President Lyndon Johnson. This policy requires states to conform to its mandates or risk the loss of federal funding. A few tenets of the law require that:

- All teachers are highly qualified
- All students will be proficient in reading and math by 2014

- All ESL, special education, Title I, and economically disadvantaged students must participate and be proficient on the state assessment test (PSSA)
- All students will attend a safe and drug-free school environment
- All paraprofessionals working with students in the schools will have a college Associate degree or pass a state test

Pennsylvania Performance Index (PPI): The Pennsylvania Performance Index provides for detecting, acknowledging, encouraging, and rewarding changes across the full range and continuum of academic achievement – not limited solely to the proficient level. The Pennsylvania Performance Index student-level scaled score values, ranges, and associated PPI index multiplier by grade and content area are shown in Appendix D.

Pennsylvania School System Assessment (PSSA): The PSSA is a yearly assessment of the Pennsylvania Academic Standards in math and reading in grades three through eight and eleven and science in grades four, eight and eleven. The test measures specified standards and eligible content specific to each grade level tested. Performance targets in each content area become one segment in the criteria used to calculate Annual Yearly Progress.

Profound change: For this study, the term profound change is defined by Peter Senge (1999) to mean organizational change that combines inner shifts in people’s values, aspirations, and behaviors with “outer” shifts in processes, strategies, practices, and systems.

Safe Harbor: Safe Harbor Confidence Interval is a statistical formula for meeting AYP by reducing the number of Basic and Below Basic sub-group students by 10% for one school year.

Purposive-rational: A term used to define a means-end category where cost-effectiveness is driven by the efficacy of policy.

Transition: For this study, transition is defined as “a three-phase process that people go through as they internalize and come to terms with the details of the new situation that the change has brought about” (Bridges, 2003).

### **Chapter Summary**

Chapter One examined the problem of centralized control of the NCLB policy, the need for the study, its significance for administrators and the conceptual frameworks for the study. Introduced was the concept of organizational change theory along with the tenets of NCLB. The process of organizational change caused by the mandated tenets of NCLB, the change process for organizations and individuals is further examined in Chapter Two.

## Chapter Two

### REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The purpose of this study is to examine the individual and organizational change perceived by rural school administrators under the implication of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) 2001 in schools making Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). In this current age of assessment and accountability, schools and administrators are faced with many changes. The changes impact the school as an organization and individual administrative tasks of those in charge of providing a quality education to the students. To understand the premise for those changes, it is necessary to lay a foundation of the No Child Left Behind Act and the particular make up the law by understanding policy and bureaucratic authority.

This chapter is organized into three parts. First, the historical background and the tenets of NCLB are explored to understand AYP and the criteria necessary to meet targeted performance goals. Also addressed is the twentieth century emergence of educational policy and evolving federal centralization as it applies to NCLB. Centralization is examined through the use of the categorical framework of rational behavior as theorized by Max Weber, a German sociologist. Purposive-rationality, one of Weber's categories of human action, poses an economical view of a cost effective means to an end. Since administrators view NCLB through a different lens than teachers, it is necessary understand how purposive-rationality leads to a bureaucratic authority and the mandates of NCLB.

Secondly, related research is reviewed that describes the changing roles of administrators due to high-stakes testing and accountability. Lastly, the conceptual framework of organizational and individual change theories were examined and linked this particular case study of rural Pennsylvania school administrators.

## **20<sup>th</sup> Century Education Policy**

### **Education Policy Before the 1940s**

Before the 1940s, federal involvement in education can be traced to several acts that affected public schools. The Northwest Ordinance of 1787 was enacted by congress whereby states in the Northwest Territory were to set aside land in each township and the proceeds from the rent of this land was given to common schools. However, later the states gave permission to sell the land and invest in state funding for schooling. The Morrill Act of 1862 was designated for land-grant colleges. Then the Smith-Hughes Act of 1917 was an unprecedented law that gave vocational aid to public secondary schools (Kaestle & Smith, 1982) in a time when the teenage labor force was declining and there was a need for manpower training for industrial progress. The trend of centralized control, however small before World War II, was inherently there and picked up momentum as the federal government sought to address industrial progress and restructure social issues through the schooling of children.

### **Post WW II Involvement**

The post WW II era of education policy-making was formed around the shared concerns of the central government, local government, and teachers

(Ozga, 2000). The 1944 Education Act was created to allow considerable autonomy to schools and Local Education Agencies (LEAs) to avoid policy-making powers of the federal government. The 1944 Education Act sought a balance of power that developed consensus around principles of access and entitlement regardless of background and a belief in human capital.

During the Cold War era of the 1950s, the Russian launch of Sputnik sparked the National Defense Education Act of 1958 (NDEA). This National crisis led to a focus on mathematics and science, quality of teachers and international competition. Public media and the Eisenhower administration touted the path to education must be changed, while Admiral Rickover stated that Dewey's teachings had led to inferior intellectual training. Due to National defense concerns, NDEA impacted math, science, and foreign language curricula. There was little concern for reading and social sciences. NDEA can be categorized as a distributive policy by analysis, whereby the government distributes wealth and privileges in the form of subsidies. This distributive education policy gave monies for specific entities of education and focused on the high achieving students. The money was allocated based on grant proposals in detailed categories. However, along with the funds comes control and compliance. If the government agency is skillful in distribution of funds, the political arena is stable and conflicts are rare (Fowler, 2000), as was the central control of schools during the Cold War.



Few contested the centralized control when there was a perceived threat to National security. This form of centralized schooling found in the NDEA Act in the opinion of Kaestle & Smith (1982) was seen as a reaction to hysteria.

From the early legislation of the 1800s to post WWII, federal centralized control in education was in response to social issues of the times. The Morrill Act of 1862 reacted to a need for higher education. The Smith-Hughes Act of 1917 granting federal funds for vocational curriculum in secondary education was a reaction to industrialization. The Education Act of 1944 was created from response to World War II, and lastly, NDEA in 1958 as a reaction to the Cold War. As centralized schooling began to take a hold on education, the grip became tighter as we entered the sixties.

### **The 1960s**

In the early to mid 1960s, education policy found its roots in social reform. McLaughlin (1992) labels this movement the first generation of reform as it sought to provide equal educational opportunity to poor children.

The 'Great Society' of the liberal Johnson administration saw the enactment of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act 1965 (ESEA) with Title I (Chapter I) and Head Start as its attempt to provide resources and services for under privileged children based on the poverty level of the school. ESEA 1965 was the first attempt to influence reading instruction.

ESEA was enacted with the purpose of giving poor students an equal opportunity in school. It, too, had consequences for noncompliance, but NCLB carries more punitive consequences for not meeting annual goals.

Juxtaposing ESEA (1965) with Max Weber's categorical value framework, as stated in Heydebrand (1994), policy funding and regulations do not follow traditional value-orientation or value-rational orientation, but align with purposive-rational values for a cost-effective means to educate poor underprivileged students and to break the cycle of poverty. ESEA 1965 allocated funds for resources to create more efficient schools for underprivileged students thus creating equal opportunity through a bureaucratic approach. The liberal administration sought to influence basic reading instruction through the regulation of funds and resources. Implicit in these regulations was the assumption that a lack of resources, not professional knowledge on the part of teachers, was holding back low-income children, (McLaughlin, 1992). Title I regulations required a set delivery system of services.

Title I personnel were hired and paid with Title I funds and were required by law to work only with Title I students, even in the halls and in the schoolyard. In classrooms, the segregation of Title I from the regular students was almost as complete. Title I students receiving remedial reading were "pulled out" of their classes and physically moved to other areas in order to receive their supplemental instruction (Kaestle & Smith, 1982). Kaestle and Smith also argue, whatever the efficacy of the Title I program, it suggests a substantial federal involvement in education.

While the policy sought to provide equal opportunity to low-income students, centralized reading instruction through Title I was problematic for both teachers and students. Title I students often experienced a fragmentation of the

school experience and were often simultaneously responsible for two reading programs from two different textbooks taught in two different styles. Centralizing remedial reading instruction relieved the regular staff of the responsibility to ensure the lowest scoring students would succeed. Also problematic for ESEA 1965 was the fact that the Title I administrative structure placed no pressure on the regular [school] structure to improve (Kaestle & Smith, 1982).

The supplemental reading service of the Title I “pull-out” reading program is an example of the efficacy of the ESEA 1965 policy to implement centralized control over how and where students received instruction; not allowing flexibility at the local level. As ESEA 1965 gets reauthorized, the grip of centralizing public education becomes tighter.

### **The 1970s**

Under the Reagan administration’s ‘New Federalism,’ the government sought to decentralize many federal responsibilities, one of which was education. The Reagan administration lacked a commitment to the poor and Title I aid was decreased. Equal opportunity for the poor or a commitment to local community schooling was not valued under Reagan. The administration refocused research and infused cold war rhetoric to make reading instruction central to National standing

Title I aid was decreased and states took on responsibility for federal education programs through the distribution of block grants. As federal education policy-making waned during the 1980s, states answered to several National Commissions on Education Reports

## **The 1980s**

In 1985, the report, *Becoming A Nation of Readers* had a government impact on reading education. Due to what was perceived as low reading ability among students, the commission urged policy-makers to establish accountability and excellence within the education system (McGill-Franzen, 2000). States responded with higher curriculum standards, rigorous certification for teachers, and new testing programs because the states were then made accountable for the Title I funds. Through a bureaucratic/ business-like approach, the federal government allocated funds to the states for literacy education. The states then needed to address the most cost-effective approach to distribute monies to local Title I programs based on the funds received. Federal monies became the responsibility of the state along with assessment for higher achievement

Title I was reauthorized in 1988 by the first Bush administration and was no longer viewed as separate from the regular classroom. During this time period, “pull-out” reading programs disappeared and rather than seeking basic skills, Title I sought mastery of skills and could be used as school-wide classroom improvement. The change of addressing the literacy instruction from a small group of low-income students to the entire student population brought an even more intrusive form of centralized schooling by controlling the curriculum of all students, not just Title I low-income students. This attempt to control literacy instruction was in direct response to accountability, moving students from basic skills to advanced/mastery skill levels and more efficient schools.

We now shift gears so the reader better grasps how NCLB impacts administrators in terms of economics, local tax bases, and state and federal allocation of Title I funds.

With the 1988 reauthorization of ESEA, the bureaucratic authority fueled by the values of purposive-rationality increased centralization by attempting to make schools even more efficient with school-wide Title I.

Table 1

*Purposive-Rationale as It Applies to Schools*

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Purpose:	Economics of efficient schooling, distribution of resources
Rationale:	Cost-effective or a means to an end
Control:	Federal authority over schools with educational policy (NCLB)

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In this 1988 legislation, school-wide Title I programs provide an example of Weber's (1994) purposive-rationale as an efficient (cost-effective) means to distribute resources, programs and instruction to the entire school in a centralized manner. Through a school-wide approach, the efficacious Title I legislation could control the curriculum and instruction of all students through policy implementation. While the federal government sees policy as a means to make schools more efficient; for years many advocates of Title I concurrently held the view that federal involvement should be limited (Kaestle & Smith, 1982).

The Education Summit in 1989 by the National Governors Association led to the National Education Goals of George Bush and the establishment of the Goals 2000 legislation where three goals pertain to literacy. These goals became a point whereby reading programs could be evaluated.

As the years progressed from the mid 1980s to the present, the escalation of centralized schooling can be tracked in local education, especially through education policy from the 1990s to the current NCLB.

### **The 1990s**

By 1994, ESEA was again reauthorized to the Improving America's Schools Act (IASA) under the Clinton administration. Clinton's reauthorization of ESEA 1984 to IASA and the America Reads Initiative are clear examples of a means to improve literacy skills in schools to benefit the economy.

Clinton sought National standards and testing to balance opportunities among groups and linked funding with compliance. But, professional organizations opposed standards. Because Clinton moved the literacy argument to economics, IASA 1994 fits easily into Weber's categorical framework of a means-end policy (purposive-rationality) where cost-effectiveness is driven by the efficacy of policy and a bureaucratic authority.

In IASA 1994, economic efficiency (cost benefits) takes precedence over other value rationalities such as traditional, affective, or value-rational (Weber, 1994); thus supporting the argument of increased centralization through a bureaucratic authority. Therefore, IASA 1994 valued economic growth, equity for poor students and an efficient citizenry.

Centralization again moved forward under IASA 1994 with programs such as Pennsylvania's Read To Succeed Program (fostered under the Reading Excellence Act) and such notions that all children would learn to read by third grade. Materials, assessment, and teaching time were controlled by centralization within the program and the state sent individual auditors to the schools to monitor all programs, student progress, and spending of funds. The Read To Succeed program was clearly an example of centralized control of reading instruction.

The historical chart of centralization, Table 2, suggests shifting ideologies as political agendas transform from the Bush administration to the view of the Clinton administration. In addition, Table 2, summarizes four decades of increasing centralization based on Weber's value-orientation of purposive-rationality. The chart indicates how bureaucratic authority happens over time and how the federal government increasingly adopts a business-like approach to literacy education. Social need or issues shown on the chart also suggest an increase in centralized schooling. Remembering that purposive-rationality searches for the most efficient economical and technical means to achieve goals, the chart indicates how shifting ideologies change from influencing reading instruction to dictating how reading is taught.

Table 2

*Evolving Educational Policy*

Policy	Date	Efforts toward educational control	Why	Visions for schools
ESEA	1965	A means to influence reading instruction and values in schools. The law required pull-out programs for low achieving readers	Johnson's war on poverty to assure that poor children had equal opportunity.	Liberal view to end the culture of poverty and discrimination so the poor could compete for well-paying jobs.
ESEA	1975-85	States responsible for Title I funds and demanded higher curriculum and testing programs for schools.	Policymaking waned in favor of National commission reports to states.	Conservative view to makes states responsibility for Title I funds.
ESEA	Late 1980s	The law required reading programs to be measured in terms of mastery of advanced skills rather than basic skills of previously authorized Title I programs.	Research studies indicated basic skills instruction was not congruent with high standards or regular classroom achievement gains.	A neo-conservative view to preserve the status quo of schooling.
IASA	1994	A push toward a National curriculum, standards, and school-wide reading programs for all students.	Directed Interventions toward the reading crisis; targeting skills of all students to prepare them for a global economy.	A neo-liberal view promotes high academic standards and testing to improve performance of all students, including the poor.
NCLB	2001	Dictates standards, curriculum, standardized testing, attendance, who teaches and how school success is measured.	To promotes values such as school choice and a response to a perceived literacy crisis.	A conservative view that is one scientific way to teach reading that is proven for all students.

In 1998, Congress passed the Reading Excellence Act that was touted the most significant law on child literacy passed by Congress in more than 30 years (U.S. Department of Education, 1998). McGill-Franzen, (2000) suggest 230



million dollars awarded from Congress was allocated to seventeen states to support professional development, transition programs for kindergarteners, family literacy, and tutoring for struggling readers.

These previous laws set the foundation for school reform and a stringent assessment and accountability system. However, NCLB makes sweeping changes to ESEA and affects all public schools receiving Title I funding. The Four Pillars of NCLB changes include: stronger accountability for results, more flexibility for states and communities, proven educational methods, and more choices for parents.

Through the last four decades, the federal government has enacted education policy to serve what it perceives as a need to shape school reform and practice. Centralized education has brought about regulatory policy, Fowler (2000) that addresses a social problem with rules and penalties attached. Fowler (2000) further explains regulatory policy as having formalized rules expressed in general terms and applied to large groups of people.

Leaving the 1990s, public education was again confronted with a meaner more aggressive form of policy found in NCLB 2002. The pinnacle of federal involvement and centralized schooling is found in the power of NCLB.

### **Post Millennium Education Policy**

As the 20<sup>th</sup> century closed, issues of school choice, assessment, high academic standards, highly qualified teachers, and poor achieving schools became the politically correct topic among legislators. Under the reauthorization

of IASA to NCLB in 2002, the NCLB Act of 2002 marks the highest form of centralized educational control in the history of education policy

NCLB is an unprecedented form of regulatory policy with the reauthorization of ESEA in 2002. The policy of NCLB gives attention to managing schools for social change. This type of school reform is meant to insure a type of quality control and equity for all students through achieving academic standards by evaluation on the Pennsylvania School Assessment System (PSSA) test. Popkewitz (2003) refers to the centralizing school management found in the NCLB policy as designed to increase efficacy and efficiency. NCLB does engage efficacy or substantial power over schools through centralization of curriculum, attendance, graduation rates, and performance targets in reading and math that make up AYP.

NCLB is a regulatory policy (Fowler, 2000) with severe consequences for those schools that do not follow the letter of the law and perform according to State guidelines. Fowler (2000) argues centralization stemming from federal and state guidelines does not always address local needs and does not allow flexibility with curriculum and instruction

Although education policymakers value efficiency through regulation [centralization] (Wirt & Kirst, 1989), centralization through NCLB is problematic for school districts, administrators, and teachers.

### **No Child Left Behind 2002**

*Public Law 107-110*, 107<sup>th</sup> Congress, better known as the *No Child Left Behind Act* 2002 is the most significant federal legislation affecting public

education in 35 years (Price, 2002). This law is an extension of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act 1964 (ESEA) with many new obligations placed on local school districts and expands the federal government's role in public education. The NCLB Act is nearly 700 pages in length and makes numerous changes to the federal law, amending sections, and adding totally new requirements. The *No Child Left Behind Act* consists of ten Titles.

Table 3

*Ten Titles of NCLB*

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Title I	Improving the Academic Achievement of the Disadvantaged
Title II	Preparing, Training, and Recruiting High Quality Teachers
Title III	Language Instruction for Limited English Proficient and Immigrant Students
Title IV	21 <sup>ST</sup> Century Schools
Title V	Promoting Informed Parental Choice and Innovative Programs
Title VI	Flexibility and Accountability
Title VII	Indian, Native Hawaiian, and Alaska Native Education
Title VIII	Impact Program
Title IX	General Provisions
Title X	Repeals, Re-designations, and Amendments to Other Statutes

Nearly all the major reforms proposed by the law fall in the area of assessment, accountability, flexibility, school choice, and school improvement. The following is a summary educational policy that leads to the current NCLB act.

## **Tenets of NCLB**

The evolution of educational policy into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, as previously stated, gives a rationale for the current NCLB Act of 2002. NCLB consists of four pillars: stronger accountability for results, more flexibility for states and communities, proven educational methods, and more choices for parents. While the act is intended to allow flexibility and school choice, there are rigorous demands placed on schools without being given equal funding to carry out the mandates.

### **Measuring Progress: NCLB Accountability**

#### **Pennsylvania School System Assessment**

The Pennsylvania plan for measuring accountability as per NCLB is titled Pennsylvania School System Assessment (PSSA) and is based on academic standards, state performance targets, participation, and graduation rates for secondary schools. However, one other academic indicator is required for public schools. Pennsylvania has chosen attendance for elementary schools as the additional academic indicator. The state plan also addresses Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) with measurable objectives in reading, math, and science for students in grades three through eight and eleven and particularly those students from the following subgroups: economically disadvantaged, Title I, students with disabilities, and students with limited English proficiency.

#### **Adequate Yearly Progress**

To measure Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), at least 95 % of all students and 95% of the students in each subgroup are required to participate in

the state assessments. Modifications and alternative assessments are made for students with disabilities, as written in their Individualized Education Plan (IEP). Each student group must meet the state achievement goal for a school to meet AYP. The overall goal for all students is to meet the state’s definition of ‘proficient’ no later than twelve years after the 2001-2002 school year. In *PA Code, Title 22, Chapter 4: Academic Standards and Assessment*, ‘proficiency’ is defined as: “satisfactory academic performance indicating a solid understanding and adequate display of the skills included in Pennsylvania’s Academic Standards.”

Table 4

*Escalating Performance Targets for Adequate Yearly Progress*

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Year	Math	Reading
2002-04	35%	45%
2005-07	45%	54%
2008-10	56%	63%
2011	67%	72%
2012	78%	81%
2013	78%	91%
2014	100%	100%

The spring 2002 PSSA assessments were used as baseline scores for charting proficiency levels of schools. The first increase must occur within two years and then every three years thereafter, until reaching 100% proficiency (Pa Department of Education, 2002).

Accountability also required State and LEA report cards to be presented to the public at the beginning of the 2002-2003 school year. The report card shows progress of State and LEA student achievement. “The federal government has the right to withhold 25 percent of funds for State administration from States that have failed to meet the 1994 deadlines for putting in place standards and a system for measuring AYP, and permits the Secretary to “withhold an unspecified amount of State administrative funds from a state that fails to meet requirements of the new law” *NCLB, Title VIII, Sec.805* (U.S. government, 2002).

### **School Improvement**

Schools failing to meet AYP for two years are identified as “in need of Improvement.” NCLB then allows parents school choice within the district, providing there is adequate classroom space. The school identified for improvement is then required to meet AYP for two consecutive years after developing and implementing a school improvement plan. The improvement plan must incorporate teaching and learning strategies from scientifically-based researched programs (Zogby, 2002). Schools that fail to improve within two years are required to offer Supplemental Educational Services (SES) to the most needy and economically disadvantaged students. After a period of five years of not meeting AYP, schools are subject to corrective actions such as: replacing school staff, restructuring, change in governance such as a State takeover or private management. To help insure school improvement, NCLB requires schools to reserve a portion of Title I Part A allocations for such improvements. However, on the other side, NCLB authorizes State Academic Achievement

Awards to schools and teachers that significantly exceed AYP for two or more consecutive years.

In the confines of accountability, NCLB adds “The Parents Right To Know” provision requiring districts to annually notify parents of their right to request information regarding the professional qualifications of their child’s teacher.

Pennsylvania uses a mixed assessment approach to comply with NCLB (Price, 2002). The Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) in math and reading is given in grades three through eight, and eleven. Holcomb (1999) relates as part of the new accountability, citizens and policymakers expect schools to justify the value and effectiveness of their programs. Pennsylvania’s third component of assessment and accountability is the Pennsylvania Value-Added Assessment System (PVAAS).

Value Added Assessment is defined as... “a statistical method of comparing student academic performance over time that determines the effectiveness of school systems, schools, and teachers” (Sanders, 1998). After the publication of *A Nation At Risk* (1985), concern for state education rose across the Nation (Sanders, 1998). In 1989, President Bush called a Governor’s Education Summit to develop a plan to address the problems facing education. From this summit, the governor of Tennessee expanded his Comprehensive Education Reform Act of 1984 to the Education Improvement Act of 1992. The Tennessee Valued Added Assessment System along with measures including promotion, attendance, and dropout rate of individual schools, provided information to form the base for the state’s new educational accountability

system. Known as the “Sanders Model,” the assessment system was structured after the early research of William Sanders. Thus, Tennessee became the leader in Value Added Assessment.

To date, the Value Added Assessment System is optional for school districts, and is proposed to provide a clearer measurement of a student’s annual progress. Currently, there are eighteen states that use Value Added Assessment as a means to track accountability and student progress (Rivers, 2002). In Pennsylvania the Pennsylvania Value Added Assessment System (PVAAS) is available to all 501 school districts. However, at this point in time, PVAAS is not used by the state for Adequate Yearly Progress.

Another component of NCLB for those LEAs receiving federal funds is the biennial participation in the National Assessment for Educational Progress. The assessment is given in grades 4 and 8 in both reading and math. Also, districts are required by NCLB to have a written policy and district plan addressing the curricular needs of Limited English Proficient (LEP) students. LEP students are required to take the PSSA state test after being in the district for 90 days regardless of their English proficiency.

Other major components of NCLB include highly qualified teachers in classrooms and paraprofessionals hired with Title I funds must have two years of higher education or meet a rigorous standard of quality established by the state or district (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2002).



With the demands on local districts to increase proficiency scores, school administrators are faced with multiple decisions with both individual and organizational changes to meet the implication of NCLB.

### **Changing Roles of Administrators**

Administrators take on several roles as building or district leaders. They manage personnel, provide research-based teaching methodologies, monitor transportation, lead school-wide improvement, evaluate curriculum, communicate with parents and staff, and take on general management duties. Senge (1990) views the administrator as a steward of the system and those individuals who are part of the system. There are also leadership expectations for principals [administrators] as stated by Seifert and Vornberg (2002):

The principal is expected to examine the beliefs and values of the system, weighing them carefully for their impact on the purpose of the school and then determine those that need to change to best meet the challenges of the larger community in which the school participates (p.20).

However, with the current NCLB law, the role of the administrator is changing to meet the demand of adequate yearly progress. Whitaker (2003) relates role changes are connected to site-based or collaborative decision-making, increased pressure related to high stakes testing and accountability, increased role of management, altered relationships with community, and dilemmas related to school choice. Also, the report of the Working Group: Department of Education and Science, (1999) reports administrator responsibilities are increased due to societal, legislative, and educational changes that lead to new challenges and new tensions. Several studies have provided an account of an increased management role with less time for

instructional leadership (Portin, 2000; Whitaker, 1998). Whitaker, (1998) argues reform at the state level has increased management roles in a time when there is increased pressure for student achievement. Principals report, in a study done by Hirsch and Groff (2002), more testing, accreditation and focus on increased student achievement have changed the role of the school principal. Anafara et al (2001) argue that due to a new reform agenda, administrators need new skills and knowledge to move forward.

Expectations for accountability are at the forefront of responsibilities for administrators and they face pressure for student achievement in regard to the PSSA test and implementing NCLB. Many states, not only Pennsylvania, are labeling schools as “high performing” or “low performing” through school reports cards (Keller 1998 ; NCLB, 2002).

### **High-stakes Testing**

The practice of high-stakes testing is not new, so then the criticism of high-stakes testing is also not new (Nichols, S. & Berliner, D., 2007). The authors argue NCLB is the reason for the current spread of high-stakes testing.

Hursh (2005) suggests, “Under NCLB, schools must not only develop and assess students, they must make public the aggregated test scores for groups of students delineated by gender, race and ethnic group, and with or without disability” (p 609). To this end, high-stakes testing has become an integral part of public education. Hursh also suggests, contrary to common sense, AYP does not measure progress or improvement of schools, but whether aggregated scores are meeting a yearly threshold that increases over the current decade.

Under Total Quality Management, Edwards Deming, argues, “most important is improving process, not on having the outcome move in the desired way,” (Nichols & Berliner, 2007, p.146). Deming saw staff improvement as the best way to improve quality. Linn (2001) also suggests accountability systems do not specify how they will affect student achievement; they assume that accountability will improve schools by stressing the importance of the outcome. “Once achievement becomes the decided goal, the next premise assumes that performance can be accurately and authentically measured by the assessment instruments used” (Locke, 2005, p13). In the case of the PSSA, it is a one shot opportunity for achievement for both students and the school. Pennsylvania does not obtain additional information to confirm the test results and thus the importance of the test and the stakes associated with it increases (Baker, Linn, Koretz, 2002).

High-stakes testing exerts a tremendous amount of pressure on administrators and staff. Threats and incentives built into high-stakes testing focus on the outcome. The authors also suggest there are two problems with pressure. First, pressure does not always change behavior for success. Collins (2001) suggests good-to-great leaders begin transformation by getting the right people on the bus. He states rigorous leaders are capable of improving performance. However, the Secretary of Education, Margaret Spellings, under the George W. Bush administration, espouses a process of rewards and punishment as a system of motivation for changing educational practice (Nichols & Berliner, 2007).

The second problem with pressure in high-stakes testing is that working conditions are being permanently changed. NCLB will replace administrators and teachers whose test scores are not meeting AYP for three consecutive years (PA Department of Education). The culture of the school changes along with morale. The culture of an organization is defined as basic assumptions and beliefs that are shared by members of the organization, (Evans, 1996). If these beliefs about high-stakes testing translate into added pressure and worry about job loss, morale declines causing a toxic environment. In a study by Locke (2005), administrators admitted to anxiety related to the public nature of NCLB. These leaders admitted to struggling individually as well as with the organization of the school. It is reported that administrators are leaving education in record numbers due to high-stakes testing pressure (Nichols & Berliner, 2007)

School administrators and principals expressed that high-stakes testing had an impact on their ability to lead their schools and the types of activities in which they engaged (Reed, C., McDonough, S., Ross, M., 2001). Administrators perceive their jobs as a balancing act between curriculum and staff support. Rural schools and administrators face many challenges.

## **Rural Schools**

### **Rural Schools Defined**

Although all schools face challenges from NCLB, rural districts and rural school administrators face unique challenges. According to the Center for Rural Pennsylvania, there are 12.4 million Pennsylvania residents living in 48 rural counties. These residents tend to be older than urban residents with 16.3 percent

being 65 years or older. In rural schools, you find small populations of students and these schools may be isolated by the geographic location.

“Clearly defining what rural means has tangible implications for public policies and practice in education, from established resource needs to achieving the goals of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) in rural areas,” (Arnold, M. et al, 2007, p. 3). The authors explain that rural can be referenced by population density, level of economics and industrial development. Other references include counties or parishes. The way rural is defined and specified (by district or school) is likely to yield different portrayals of rural students, which affect education policy and practices (Arnold, et al, 2007). What is considered rural in one part of the country may not be considered rural in another part of the country. In 2006-2007, more than 503,900 students were enrolled in Pennsylvania’s 243 rural school districts (Rural Pennsylvania, 2007).

### **Rural Schools: The Positives and the Challenges**

Positive aspects of rural schools include: lower dropout rates and a higher enrollment in post secondary schools (Funk & Bailey, 1999.) “Small schools also reduce harmful effects of poverty on student achievement” (Howley & Bickle as cited in Haas, 2000). Research supports the notion that young people learn best in small settings where teachers know how to boost academic achievement.

However, negative aspects of rural schools do exist. “Small schools, many of which are rural, are in greater danger of being mislabeled as in need of improvement” (Reeves, 2003, p.4). These small populations of students impact test scores due to fluctuation of ability levels, mobility or incoming ESL students.

Also, finances and resources play a role in making AYP. Finances of small rural districts can affect implementing the tenets of NCLB. Hiring highly qualified teachers and retaining teachers is difficult due to lower salary scales. Reeves (2000) suggests rural districts have difficulty recruiting teachers with multiple credentials to comply with the law. Administrators have difficulty hiring foreign language teachers and teachers for bilingual programs. With increased demand for highly qualified teachers, salaries are competitive leaving rural districts with high teacher turnover. Administrators face the issue of staff development, transportation, materials, and facilities as they implement NCLB.

However, creating a learning organization for student achievement is a challenge faced by all administrators. Bennett & Brown (1995) propose that stakeholders in any system have within them the wisdom and creativity to confront even the most difficult challenges. The authors further purport that inquiring into the most critical challenges and simultaneously noticing the way one thinks about them has the potential to yield insight, which neither can do alone.

Keeping current with mandates of the law, leading staff and proposing organizational change to promote student achievement will be explored. The change needed for professional and organizational development is the focus of the next section.

### **Organizational Change Process and Theory**

Peter Senge (2000) suggests that “schools can be re-created, made vital, and sustainably renewed not by fiat or command, and not by regulation, but by

taking a learning orientation” (p.6). Involving everyone in the system to express his or her aspirations and capabilities is a necessary part of a learning orientation. Senge’s “Fifth Dimension” approach seems to resonate with educators because the underlying premise of organizational learning is that people marry their aspirations with better performance over the long run. Schools that learn must be supported by administrators, districts, and communities. Also, according to Senge, “sustainable communities need viable schools for all their children and learning opportunities for all of their adults” (p.6). Schools that learn and organizational change can be defined by the “Five Learning Disciplines,” (Senge et al., 1999).

The five learning disciplines are offered by Senge et al. as a means to structure learning organizations and to offer genuine help for dealing with the dilemmas and pressures of education today. Senge et al. (1999, p.6) reveal a pathway for the process of change in what is called the fifth discipline. The disciplines follow a line of actions and beliefs that drive the organization to positive change. Following are the stages of the five disciplines that drive organizational change.

Discipline 1: Personal Mastery: It is a practice of articulating a coherent image of your personal vision. Along with realistic assessment, this produces a tension, expands your capacity to make better choices and results you want.

Discipline 2: Shared Vision: This vision focuses on a mutual purpose by a group of individuals (teachers, administrators, and staff in a school). These

individuals share a commitment to developing shared images of the future to create the principles and guiding practices by which to get there.

Discipline 3: Mental Model: This discipline focuses around developing awareness of attitudes and perceptions. Since most mental models are un-discussable and hidden from view, it is necessary to develop the capability to talk safely and productively about dangerous and discomforting subjects.

Discipline 4: Team Learning: This is a discipline of group interaction such as: dialogue, and skillful discussion to transform collective thinking, to mobilize energies and actions, and to achieve common goals.

Discipline 5: In this discipline, people learn to better understand interdependency and change and are better able to deal more effectively with the forces that shape the consequences of their actions. Systems thinking is a powerful practice for finding the leverage needed to get the most constructive change. Senge (1999) sees the five dimensions as a pathway to change, Additionally, Pink (2005) argues putting the pieces together is a “symphony.” The author further implies, “Symphony, as I call this aptitude, is the ability to put together the pieces. It is the capacity to synthesize rather than to analyze; to see relationships between seemingly unrelated fields; to detect broad patterns rather than to deliver specific; and to invent something new by combining elements nobody thought to pair” (p. 130).

While Senge designs a fluid process to schools that learn, Kotter (2002) also offers a framework for change. “The process of change involves subtle points regarding overlapping stages, guiding teams at multiple levels in the



organization, handling multiple cycles of change, and more” (Kotter, 2002, p.6).

The flow of change for Kotter occurs in eight steps. These steps include: 1) increase urgency, 2) build a guiding team, 3) get the vision, 4) communicate for buy-in, 5) empower action, 6 create short-term wins, 7) don't let up, and 8) make change stick.

Looking at both frameworks, Kotter and Senge, juxtapose several stages in the process of a learning organization. Both authors see a need for a shared vision to build a team for buy-in. Also, empowerment and team learning are central to both frameworks. Where Senge and Kotter differ is on the systems thinking model. Systems thinking is based on the behavior of feedback and complexity or the innate tendencies of a system that lead to growth or stability over time. Systems thinking is defined as developing awareness of complexity, interdependencies, change, and leverage. In *Schools that Learn*, Senge (2000) relates, “...such techniques as stock-and-flow diagrams, systems archetypes and various types of learning labs and simulations help students gain a broader and deeper understanding of the subject they study. Systems thinking is a powerful practice for finding the leverage needed to get the most constructive change” (p.8). In systems thinking, problems and goals are perceived as isolated events, but are part of a larger structure or picture of the whole organization. Zmuda, et al (2004), see systems thinking as the door to continuous improvement. They suggest, “The school is a system of interlocking and interacting elements with beliefs and behavioral norms that define a culture and their role in promoting or blocking change.” (p. 29).

Kotter (2002) relies on urgency or seeing a need for change, while Senge et al. use a mental model and systems thinking to initiate change. Evans (1996) offers yet another model for change. The author sees “unfreezing” as a method to begin the change process; where Evans suggests “unfreezing is a matter of lessening one kind of anxiety, the fear of trying, but first of mobilizing another kind of anxiety, the fear of not trying” (p.56). It often means there is a need to challenge people to face realities they have preferred to avoid. Hall and Hord (2006) speak to the complexities of the change process as “concerns” and have established seven categories in what they title the “Stages of Concerns.”

In *Dance of Change* (1999), Senge suggests maintaining any profound change requires a shift in thinking to go through the growth process and also understanding the challenges that are faced along the way. Challenges in the change process are central to Evans (1996); Hall and Hord (2006); Kotter (2002); Senge (2000). However, Hall and Hord (2006), see “pot holes and concerns, while, (Evans, 1996), adds anxiety in change. Senge argues there must be an appreciation for “the dance of change” or the interaction between growth and limitation.

### **Making the Change**

Acting on a vision and removing barriers on the path are necessary for the change process. Attaining empowerment according to Kotter (2002) is all about removing barriers for change. The author suggests the system itself can be a barrier due to bureaucracy or layers of rules and procedures. The shared vision for change can be impeded by a system of evaluations and rewards. The vision

may also project one thing while the system projects another. The mind or mental thinking can also be a barrier because people may think they are incapable of change, (Kotter, 2002). However, Senge (1999) argues creating a mental model and creating a shared vision is a means to overcome barriers to make necessary changes.

Systems change is also suggested by Schlechty (2005) for creating great schools. Schlechty argues there are six critical systems that are key to dramatically changing how schools do business. The author identifies these critical systems as 1) the recruitment and induction system, 2) the knowledge transmission system, 3) the power and authority system, 4) the evaluation system, 5) the directional system, and 6) the boundary system. Senge (2000) and Schlechty (2005) espouse it is the systems within the organization where change is most critical and the systems coming together initiate change.

For (Collins, 1999), the change process is getting the “wrong people off the bus” (p. 41) and eliciting the hedge hog concept, (p. 90). This concept consists of overlapping ideas of what you are passionate about, what you can be best at and what is your driving force. Collins describes hedge hogs as “little dowdy creatures that know ‘one big thing’ and stick to it” (p.119). Making changes for Senge (1999) consists of support and coaching at all levels, including internal and external support. While Kotter (2002) agrees that support is a necessary part of the change process, he suggests short-term wins can diffuse cynicism, pessimism, and skepticism, thus builds momentum for change.

Kotter (2002) also argues successes must be visible and speak to what people deeply care about.

In *The Human Side of School Change*, Evans (1996) argues for change to occur, "...people must be moved. This requires not just an idea, but an advocate" (p.201). Evans credits a leader, as the force for change, who communicates and enlists the organization's members in pursuing a profound goal or agenda. Additionally, Evans further suggests, a leader's commitment to the goal is crucial to its adoption. Transformational leaders according to Rolls (1995), "...provide the critical set of conditions under which employees [staff] can unfold, transform, grow and flourish" (p.103). The author espouses transformational leaders master the five disciplines identified by Peter Senge to bring about positive change. Organizations that excel in the future are organizations that adapt, learn and have a commitment (Rolls, 1995).

The frameworks for change process offered by, Evans (1996); Kotter, (2002) and Senge, (1999) set the organization forward to make the changes necessary for vibrant learning organizations such as the schools. While change may be a challenge due to potholes (Hall & Hord, 2006), physical and mental barriers, resistance by staff and system bureaucracy, maintaining and sustaining change is yet a greater hurdle.

### **Sustaining the Change**

Once the change has taken place, "the most common problem at this stage in change efforts is sagging urgency. "Success becomes an albatross" (Kofman & Senge, 2002, p.144). When staff have accomplished goals and a

sense of success has set in, an organization can fall back to step one of the change process (Kotter, 2002; Senge, 1999; Rolls, 1995).

Kotter (2002) states, "...even if urgency remains high, even if people want to take on big problems and if they succeed in generating waves of change, they can still fail due to exhaustion" (p.146). The build-up of action to success and breaking through the climb to the top can be a treacherous journey. However, Collins (2001) sees endurance to preserve core values and purpose as a way to sustain change. The author coins the phrase "preserve the core and stimulate the progress" as a means to sustain change (p.195).

Having an advocate for core beliefs of staff, results in a leader who can effectively manage the daily events of the organization while preserving momentum (Smith, Maher, & Midgley, 1992). The authors also suggest effective learning organizations have effective leaders.

While Senge (1999) believes leadership is key to sustaining change, he argues that leaders must "walk the talk" (p. 214). Not only do leaders follow the plan of change, they create an aura of trust and safety for staff to become confident in what they do. Keeping a focus with clarity is suggested by Evans (1996) for maintaining a change with members of the organization. Robert Evans articulates, "...for innovation to succeed both its essential components and its relative priority must be evident to its key participants" (p.206). The shared vision (Senge, 1999, Evans, 1996) is crucial to innovation because it helps make organizational membership meaningful thus maintaining the goals of the change

process. “A vision’s main function is to inspire people and to concentrate their efforts on the pursuit of a meaningful common agenda” (Evans, 1996, p.207).

### **Individual Change**

The goals of NCLB have challenged district administrators and schools to “rethink the structure, organization, and delivery of education in public schools” (Reeves, 2003, p.1). “As a new lens on organizational purpose and structure, the concept of a learning organization- an organization that consciously and intentionally develops its members and transforms itself- may provide a critical framework for shaping the successful business [school] of the knowledge era” (Morris, 1995). Leading in the knowledge era is a challenge for administrators facing the obstacles of change. When leading through difficult times, the administrator challenges what people hold dear; “their daily habits, tools, loyalties, and ways of thinking” (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002, p.2). The authors argue people push back when the equilibrium of personal and institutional ways are disturbed. The staff may support change, but they want to ensure that the change will cause minimal disturbance.

Administrators who become transformational leaders transform followers, (Couto, 1995). Couto also suggests a changed leader assists a group of people to move from one stage of development to a higher one and in doing so address and fulfill a human need. The administrator who experiences individual change has the ability to shape, alter and elevate the motivation, values and goals of followers. A changed administrator wants to create an environment that allows the staff to recognize the organization’s goal and to go beyond past

accomplishments. Kirby (1992) suggests transformational leadership is development-oriented toward change, so the administrator focuses on individual growth that improves performance and then in turn leads to organizational change. Marzano, et al. (2005) suggest, "...the school leader must attend to the needs of and provide personal attention to individual staff members, particularly those who seem left out," (p. 13).

From the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (Kirby, 1992) four factors emerge that measure the changed leader: charisma, individualized consideration, stimulation and inspiration. Transformational administrators allow followers [staff] to develop their capabilities and treat them on a one-to-one basis. "Intellectual stimulation is the encouragement to challenge the status quo and take risks. Followers [staff] are supported for creativity and self-direction" (Kirby, 1992, p. 304). "Visionary leaders understand that distributing knowledge is the secret to success; as a result, they share it openly" (Goleman, 2002, p. 59). The visionary style works well when the organization is a drift or is in need of a turnaround. Goleman suggests the visionary mode comes naturally to the transformational administrator who wants to radically change the organization. "Idealized influence is equated to the charismatic quality of a transformational leader. Followers that define a leader [administrator] with idealized influence have respect, trust and confidence in the leader and identify with the leader and the leader's vision" (Riker, 2006). However, individual change for administrators not only happens through a transformation, but administrators also experience individual change through transaction.

## **Change for School Administrators**

Burns (1995) defines leadership “as leaders inducing followers to act for certain goals that represent the values and the motivations-the wants and needs, the aspirations and expectations- of both leaders and followers” (p.100). Burns suggests leadership is found in the context of how leaders see and act on their own and their followers values. When one person contacts another for the purpose of an exchange of values or concrete issues, this person is seen as a transactional leader [administrator]. However, the relationship does not bind a leader and the staff in the goal of a higher purpose. Kirby (1992) argues, “transactional leaders concentrate on clarifying, explaining, and implementing the status quo requirements, roles, and rewards of the tasks” (p. 304). The author found two factors measuring the transactional leader: 1) contingent reward; that which awards objectives that are met and 2) management-by-exception defines the leader who lets organizational members alone to do their jobs unless problems are perceived. These leaders will then correct, sanction or criticize behaviors. Transactional leadership is based in contingency, in that reward or punishment is contingent upon performance. Transactional leaders are seen as hands-off leaders. They tend to be directive and sometimes dominating and also tend to be action oriented.

Riker (2006) states, “...transactional leaders [administrators] focus on the operational concerns in a work environment. Similar to the transformational leader [administrator], transactional leaders [administrator] respond to the needs of the followers [staff] and recognize the tasks and requirements that the followers [staff] must complete in order to reach a desired outcome (p.67).



While transactional administrators are more managerial, their relationships tend to be less personal and more concerned with the function of the organization. "When administrators 'go along' instead of leading, they perpetuate mediocrity," Schmoker, 2006, p.29P

Follower [staff] satisfaction is another issue when leading adults in organizational change. Administrators not only need to know their staff, but also need to choose a leadership style that will engage the staff to accept ownership of suggested changes. Understanding adult development theory and the stages of adult transition is a necessary skill for administrators in school districts when change is in place. The change process, the resistance to change and the transition from old to new are felt by members of the organization with a need for a leader's understanding.

### **Adult Development Theory**

As administrators seek to implement the mandates of NCLB, they face dissonance among staff. Understanding the dissonance and knowing ways to "get the right people on the bus" (Collins, 2001) is crucial for organizational change.

Bridges (2003) maintains that change is not the problem. It is the transition that causes the situation to be troublesome. The author suggests there are three phases to go through before people internalize and come to grips with the new situation caused by the change. Bridges (2003) points out the stages of transition "as 1) learning to let go of the old ways; 2) going through an in between time and 3) coming out of the transition and making a new beginning" (p.5). The

transition starts with an ending. An end to a teaching method and beginning a new method. It is the neutral area, the in between stage, where the psychology of change takes place. Bridges (2003) warns that is in this state of disequilibrium that employees become frightened and try to escape. Employee turnover is highest during this point of organizational change. "Painful as it is, the neutral zone is the individual's and organization's best chance to be creative, to develop into what they need to become, and to renew themselves" (Bridges, 2003, p. 9). Employees find it is not the changes they resist, it is the endings and beginnings of change that are uncomfortable. However, it is the losses that most affect employees. Evans (1996) shares, "Whatever improvement change may promise, it almost always increases confusion and unpredictability" (p. 34). Bolman and Deal (1991) agree suggesting,

During change, people no longer know what their duties are, how to relate to others, or who has the authority to make decisions. The structural benefits of clarity, predictability, and rationality are replaced with confusion, loss of control, and the belief that politics rather than policy are now governing everyday behavior (p. 382).

However, Senge et al. (1999) argue, "Fear and anxiety should not be seen as "problems" to be cured" (242). The authors feel they are natural responses to change. "Fear and anxiety may be the most frequent challenge in sustaining profound change and the most difficult to overcome" (Senge et al., 1999, p.243). Often, according to Senge, people who try to change organizations run up against attitudes that seem unchangeable. It is necessary to make sense of the culture evolution and understand resistance. Fullan, (1991) states, "Pressure without support leads to resistance and alienation; support without pressure

leads to drift or waste of resources” (p. 91). So, it becomes imperative that an administrator, manager, supervisor or leader during the time of change understand the culture of resistance.

Organizational culture is difficult to define and has many definitions, (Evans, 1996). However, one definition states that culture is defined as the deeper level of basic assumptions and beliefs that are shared by the members of an organization. Evans (1996) argues the beliefs are learned responses to a group’s problems of internal integration.

The culture of resistance arises from the problems and the groups perceptions of the problems. As the assumptions and beliefs permeate an entire organization, they become invisible; they become so accepted, so automatic and ingrained in the organization’s routine practices that they are automatically taught to its new members, by both precept and example, as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel about problems (p. 41).

The culture of resistance is the deepest level of culture in that it guides behavior and shapes the way group members perceive, think, and feel. At this level, behavior is unconscious, and implicit. Vaill (1989) underscores this point by defining culture as a “system of attitudes, actions, and artifacts that endures over time and produces among its members a relatively unique psychology” (p. 147). The unique psychology as stated above gives meaning to attitudes, actions, and artifacts of a school’s culture of resistance.

Peter Senge (1999) feels empowering people in an unaligned organization is counter productive and is a cause for stress and resistance. His premise lies in a mental model or a shared vision among people in the organization. Without

a shared vision, there is a burden on management and an organization that does not progress.

Not to be over looked is the level of adult development that gives rise to resistance and reluctance for organizational change. Adults travel through a development process not unlike children or adolescents. The life-span development perspective views human development as an ongoing process (Lemme, 2002). During the various stages of adulthood, behaviors, values, and ideas develop or decline. In an organization, age events may determine the level openness or resistance. For example, death of a spouse, may leave the employee not engaged with daily work related events and decision-making.

Evans (1996) suggests there are three phases of adulthood that affect one's attitude toward change. First, entering a new career brings on demands of the occupation and learning how to master the demands. Second, the mid-career phase is the period when "one has learned the ropes" (p. 103) and is established in a position. During this period, Evans, suggests the readiness to innovate may be limited by demotivation, boredom, loss of enthusiasm, diminished job interest and a leveling of growth and performance. In other words, the growth curve flattens out. Evans (1996) claims in mid-career one's focus shifts to include a growing preoccupation with personal and family concerns. These concerns, according to Evans, pull on one's energy and attention and affect the investment in a person's job; priorities move away from work issues and move toward personal issues. "Given the rise in personal and family demands and the drop in work motivation and interest, veteran staff are

more likely to limit their time at work to the essential, if not the minimum” (Evans, 1996, p.106). In a study by Michael Huberman (1989), a clear pattern was found that with age and experience, teachers became more conservative and fatalistic; less willing to invest themselves in their careers and in change initiatives.

Huberman (1989) states “...veteran teachers avoided additional administrative tasks or off-hours commitments...not getting involved in future school-wide innovations...reducing commitments, using seniority to carve out a comfortable schedule” (p.49).

The concepts of life stages or phases seek to describe a type of universality. But, the sixties cohort of teachers adds another dimension to reluctance and resistance to change. Evans (1996) implies the 1960s and 1970s produced the first large group ever to make a full career out of teaching. Adding to reluctance and resistance to change is the fact the sixties cohort includes a high number of male teachers who show greater evidence of burn out than their female counterparts and are more vocal and defiant. Evans (1996, p. 93) chooses to call the sixties cohort as the “greyer and grimmer faculty.”

The author further states, “Administrators complain that staff are coasting (or worse) in the classroom and participating less in the life of the school (p.94).

Administrators seeking individual and organizational change are faced with the dilemma of introducing change, motivating staff to take ownership of change and transitioning through change for the betterment of the organization.

Organizational change theory is explored to understand the evolution of institutional change, the phases of organizational change, and the theories that support organizational change.

### **Chapter Summary**

The literature review has outlined the inception of educational policy and centralization of education to the current tenets of the No Child Left Behind Act 2002. The historical review lays the foundation for understanding the evolution of the No Child Left Behind Act 2002 and its affect on the educational system as well as the changing roles of administrators. Literature related to administrators' role changes, accountability tied to NCLB, and standardized testing is explored. Chapter Two reviewed the theoretical concepts of leading researchers regarding change process, organizational change, individual change and systems change. Reviewed also was adult development theory and its connection to systems change and mental models. Understanding stages of adult development is crucial to overcoming resistance to change and staff morale.

This chapter also reviewed high-stakes testing and its connection to schools, teacher morale and added pressure for administrators in creating community rapport. Adequate Yearly Progress is aligned with the high-stakes PSSA test where subgroups of students can make a school in "need of improvement" when the total school population is proficient on the targeted benchmarks.

Included in Chapter Two was an overview of transformational and transactional leadership theory to assist in the investigation of individual change.

Connecting leadership styles to motivating and guiding staff in transition for organizational change is also reviewed. A discussion of the “neutral zone” and the “greyer grimmer” staff also adds to the understanding of reluctance and resistance to change.

The investigation for this study relied on the conceptual framework of organizational and individual change theory to investigate change process. The concepts and theories of the change process drive the research questions for this study found in Chapter Three.

Additionally, the literature review revealed a gap in the research pertaining to the affects and perceptions of educational policy on administrators, the change process and also the limitations relative to rural school administrators.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **METHODOLOGY**

The purpose of this study was to explore the individual and organizational change experiences of rural elementary school administrators under the implication of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) 2002 in three schools making Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). Specifically, it sought to identify the elements that facilitate and impede the translation of National policy to local educational practices. This chapter defines the rationale, the research design, known as the Art of Portraiture, the participants, setting, and the method of data analysis.

#### **Rationale for Qualitative Research Design**

For this case study, the researcher chose a qualitative paradigm to gather descriptive personal data, illuminating specific dimensions through the interview process. “Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how they make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world” (Merriam, 1998, p. 6). This study was best served by a qualitative method due to its goal of revealing policy and gathering content data that provide “rich and thick descriptions,” (Merriam, 1998, p. 211). The study was conducted to document and understand the experiences of rural principals while implementing the mandated educational policy. “Some research studies lend themselves more to qualitative types of research, for instance, research that attempts to uncover the nature of persons’ experiences with a phenomenon...” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 19). The perceived experiences of rural school administrators acting within the phenomenon of NCLB was best



served through the art of portraiture, as a method of inquiry and documentation in the social sciences. Portraiture is a way to connect authenticity and authority for defining truth.

In educational research, Metz (2000) states, “Qualitative research design is preferred by sociologists in studying education in the United States” (p.41). Case study research relies on a bounded system to examine a specific phenomenon such as a person, a program, an event or a process (Smith, 1978). In this case, it is the phenomenon of the perceived implications of NCLB that seeks to be understood.

### **Portraiture**

The qualitative method that best suited the phenomenological nature of this study is known as Portraiture. In *The Art of Portraiture*, (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997) describes telling one’s story as portraiture, a form of empirical qualitative research. The author suggests portraiture tends to blur the boundaries in an effort to capture the complexity of human experience in the people being studied. The portraitist [researcher] wants to weave the story being told by the participant. Additionally, portraitists seek to record the perceptions and experiences of the people they are studying; documenting their voices and their visions (p.xv). Lawrence-Lightfoot (1997) suggests, portraiture is not simply telling stories, but is intended to inform and inspire readers.

Portraiture is deeply empirical, grounded in systematically collected data, skeptical questioning (of self and actors), and rigorous examination of biases—always open to disconfirming evidence,” (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997, p. 85).

“The portraits are shaped through dialogue between the portraitist and the subject, each one participating in the drawing of the image,” (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997, p.3).

From the narrative, the portraitist constructs the portrait while attending to four dimensions: 1) conception which refers to development of the overarching story; 2) structure which refers to the layering of emergent themes that scaffolds the story; 3) the form that reflects movement of the data to spin the tale and 4) cohesion that brings integrity and unity to the piece (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997).

Lawrence-Lightfoot (1997) also suggests portraiture is a method that is defined by the phenomenological paradigm and uses many values and traditions of ethnography.

Like Patton (1990), Merriam (1998), also suggests qualitative design allows the researcher to approach the fieldwork without being constrained by predetermined categories of analysis. In portraiture, the threads or categories emerge as themes that connect or disconnect the participants. Fieldwork allows the researcher to physically go to the people, the setting, the site or the institution to observe in a naturalistic way. In discussing fieldwork, Creswell (1994) points out, “Qualitative researchers strive for “understanding” that deep structure of knowledge that comes from visiting personally with informants, spending extensive time in the field, and probing to obtain detailed meanings” (p. 193).

Fieldwork is an important aspect of portraiture as it sets the context for the setting and places people in a time and place to understand what they do and

say. Portraitists view human experience as being framed and shaped by the setting.

Lawrence-Lightfoot (1997) suggests that there is an openness, depth, and detail to qualitative research. In the qualitative paradigm, the portraitist is interested in the process, meaning, and understanding of the case being studied.

This study attempted to document individual and organizational change as perceived by school administrators as they implement the mandates of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. The data analysis sought to interpret perceptions of the administrators as they seek to bring about change within their perspective schools.

Using the art of portraiture as a method of study, the portraitist is able hear and connect the personal stories of the actors during the interview process and gather an understanding to make meaning of their perceptions. Portraiture allows the reader to view the whole. Threads or themes emerge to weave the tapestry of the narrative.

### **Interviewing**

“At the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the experiences of other people and the meaning they make of that experience” (Seidman, 1991, p. 3). Interviewing suggests that the portraitist is the primary instrument for data collection and people are the source of that data framed by the setting. According to Wengraf (2002) there are specific features of in-depth interviews:

- “The interview is a research interview, designed for the purpose of improving knowledge.
- It is a special type of conversational interaction; in some ways it is like other conversations, but has special features, which need to be understood.
- It has to be planned and prepared for like other forms of research activity, but what is planned is a deliberate half-scripted or quarter-scripted interview. The interview as a whole is a joint production, a co-production, by you and the interviewee.
- It is to go into matters “in-depth” (p. 3).

“The researcher cannot observe how people have organized the world and the meanings they attach to what goes on in the world -- we have to ask people questions about those things” (Merriam, 1988, p. 72). The choice of interviewing is to allow the researcher to enter into another person’s perspective when behaviors cannot be observed (Wengraf, 2002; Merriam, 1998 & Patton, 1990). Interviewing will then help the researcher understand and reconstruct the experiences of the individual’s interview (Porterfield, 2006).

The questions used in this study were structured using the framework of Wengraf (2002) and based on the literature of organizational and individual change theory.

The art of portraiture is like that of phenomenology, whereby, there is an examination of detailed descriptions of the experiences of the people being studied, (Creswell, 1994). Creswell offers phenomenology as a method that

involves studying a small number of subjects through extensive and prolonged engagement to develop patterns and relationships of meaning (p. 12).

Polkinghorne, as cited in Creswell (1998), suggests phenomenology is seen as a method for exploring the structures of consciousness in human experience. It is this human experience that a portraitist-researcher wants to understand and create a meaning.

Within the phenomenological framework, portraitists find context crucial to their documentation of human experience and organizational culture (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, p.41). It is in the context that a portraitist views that human experience as being framed and shaped by the setting.

Expanding research in the perceptions of school administrators as they face the challenges of educational policy may help other administrators when faced with similar situations. A fuller understanding of mandated policy may build professionalism among peers who encounter the “potholes” of change.

### **Setting of the Study**

“Priming the canvas” of portraiture, the portraitist utilizes vivid examples of the context from personal, historical and internal perspective of the players [participants] (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997). Portraiture is about building relationships to gather valid data from the research questions. Therefore, the setting for the participant must be comfortable and familiar. According to Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997), interviews should be conducted in the participant’s natural setting.

Given the framework of portraiture, the setting for this case study was the principals' and teachers' schools in the three school districts within rural Central Pennsylvania. Districts A, B, and C were rural districts with one elementary school, one middle school and one high school. The sites were purposefully selected based on three criteria: 1) rural school status, 2) schools making Annual Yearly Progress (AYP), for two consecutive years, as defined by the performance indicators of the Pennsylvania School System Assessment (PSSA) and 3) location. South Central Pennsylvania was chosen for this study due to the close proximity to the researcher, time constraints and job responsibilities.

Districts were selected in the following manner. After listing all rural school districts in Central Pennsylvania, the list was further defined by districts making AYP for two consecutive years, location and similar demographics. With those school districts identified with the three criteria, districts were then purposefully selected from the composed list.

Table 5

*Demographics of Participating Rural Schools*

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Districts	Status	Enrollment	Cost per student	% Low Income	Made AYP
District A	Rural	1,375	\$11,090	47%	Yes
District B	Rural	1,897	\$10,144	42%	Yes
District C	Rural	1,466	\$10,371	50%	Yes

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## **Participant Selection**

### **Interview Pool**

Participants for this case study were chosen with the purposeful sampling technique. Patton (1990) suggests,

The logic of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases for study in depth. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research, thus the term purposeful sampling (p.169).

A qualitative study requires careful thought and planning of the setting, interview questions and the participants

The participants, rural school administrators (principals) and nine teachers were selected from three school districts by a purposive sample. The administrator sample was chosen within Central Pennsylvania school districts and included building principals. Anonymity of the school districts and the interviewees was maintained at all times. The data gathered from all meetings were securely held in a locked filing cabinet.

### **Administrator Participants**

Three in-depth interviews along with several follow-up contacts included

### **Administrator Selection**

The elementary school administrators interviewed had three to five years of experience and, they had served at least two years in the same building making AYP. Contacting these administrators from the rural school districts was a two-step method as described in the research design section. Excluded from participation were those administrators who did not fully fit the stated criteria.

## **Teacher Participants**

Three in-depth interviews along with several follow-up contacts were conducted with nine teachers in school districts used in this study.

## **Teacher Selection**

One fourth, fifth and sixth grade teacher were chosen in each building where the participating administrator was employed. After the study was explained to the staff, three teachers volunteered to take part. The teachers had served in the same grade level classroom for two consecutive years and had prepared for and administered the PSSA test in the building of the participating administrator.

## **Document Data Pool**

Patton (1990) suggests documents and records are a rich source of information. The author proposes, "They [documents] may reveal things that have taken place before the evaluation began (p. 233). Since PSSA scores are public domain, the portraitist gathered data from the PDE website. Analysis included performance targets, scaled scores, and percentage of students making proficiency in math and reading. Sub-group students: special education, economically disadvantaged, English as a Second Language and Title I, were also analyzed for percentage of proficiency. Since there are several ways to calculate AYP, the portraitist also analyzed Safe Harbor, Pennsylvania Performance Index, and Confidence Interval records to converge data from three sources (Appendix D). Patton (1990) suggests, "One of the best uses of



program records and documents is to get a behind-the-scenes look at the program” (p. 234).

### **Research Design**

In the art of portraiture, the interview process was designed to gather a narrative from the administrators to answer the open-ended research questions. The interviews also included teachers, serving in the building with the administrator, to cross-check the visions and beliefs of the principals. Case study research by a portraitist allowed the researcher to hear the stories of individuals. Lawrence-Lightfoot (1997) suggests, “The portraitist-researcher is engaged in a discourse between two mutually informative aspects of methodology; the process of data gathering and the process of shaping the final product” (p.60).

The portraitist conducted in-depth interviews and collected extensive field notes to provide the reader with a detailed description of individual and organizational change of the participants. Data collection occurred in three phases. Each session had a different focus. First, the portraitist gathered demographic data to better understand the duties of school administrators; secondly, the portraitist listened to their stories and experiences regarding NCLB and administrative practice in an open-ended, semi-structured interview to further gather data to answer the research questions. A third interview for follow-up occurred to clarify any information after the interview narrative was transcribed and after a review of PSSA Performance Scores. Each session was audio taped with the intent to transcribe the tapes within forty-eight hours.

## **Validity**

Validity was established in two ways. First, a panel of administrator experts reviewed the interview questions to establish if the questions measured the intent of the case study and their alignment to the research questions. Seese, L., Madaus, J., Bray, M., & Kehle, T. (2007) suggest an instrument can be developed for a study using content experts who possess technical expertise and knowledge of the issues. Secondly, the pilot study revealed the interview questions answered and measured the intended research questions.

Goetz & LeCompt (1984) as cited in Lawrence-Lightfoot (1997) suggest “validity may be the major strength” of ethnography. Miles & Huberman (1994) see validity as “truth value,” for example, they ask, “Do the findings of the study make sense? Are they credible to the people who we study, and to our readers? Do we have an authentic portrait of what we were looking at?” (p.278).

## **Reliability**

Reliability was measured by converging the multiple sources of data gathered from administrators, teachers, congruent PSSA data, field notes and the portraitist’s reflection journal. Stake (1995) emphasizes the importance of multiple data sources in a case study to provide multiple perspectives and increased reliability.

## **Framework for Data Collection**

The framework for this portraiture study followed organizational change theory and individual change theory. Using Senge’s (2000) cycle of organizational change, the five disciplines were used to code interview data. The

five disciplines included: systems thinking for understanding the whole system, shared vision for focusing on what the organization wants to achieve, personal mastery for identifying what an individual wants in the organization, mental models for separating what is observed from assumptions, and team learning for coming together to discuss and learn from each other (Hall & Hord, (2006). The inquiry into the cycle of organizational change in this study can be defined by Creswell (1994) who suggests... “inquiry is a process of understanding a social or human problem, based on a complex holistic picture, formed with words, reporting detailed views of informants, and conducted in a natural setting” (p.2).

### **Methods of Collecting Data**

The portraitist proceeded by sending, a letter to the superintendents of the three selected school districts asking for permission to interview administrators and teachers. Once permission was received, a letter was sent to the administrators and teachers asking them to participate in the case study. Then the portraitist followed up with a phone interview clarifying criteria for participation in the study, gathering demographic information, and getting a verbal commitment before sending the letter of “consent to participate” Appendix C).

A list of administrators and addresses were located in the Pennsylvania school directory and was used for mailing the letters and the consent-to-participate form. The letter contained a formal explanation of the study, along with a self-addressed stamped envelope for returning the consent

letter. Contacting the teachers followed the same format as contacting administrators.

Data were collected through a series of three sessions with the administrators and classroom teachers. Interview questions were framed with the five disciplines of organizational change theory of Senge (2000).

### **Research Questions**

Research questions should represent specific restatements of the purpose of the study (Creswell, 1994). These questions were open-ended, evolving and non-directional, restated the study's purpose and more specifically began with words such as: what or how...not 'why.' The goal of this study was to understand the phenomenon of rural school administrators implementing the mandates of NCLB. During the course of this study, the following questions guided the investigation.

The overarching question for the study: What accounts for the success of meeting Adequate Yearly Progress on the Pennsylvania School System Assessment?

1. What obstacles do elementary school administrators face as they implement the NCLB law?
2. How do elementary school administrators implement the specific components of NCLB?
3. What is the most dramatic change to administrative practice since the implementation to NCLB?

4. How do elementary administrators adapt to increased mandates for accountability?
5. How is organizational change affected by the contextual mandates of NCLB?

### **Interview Questions**

Data collection through in-depth interviews is the method used in the art of portraiture research. Portraitists aim to capture the “dance of dialog,” a position on the periphery of the action, a place from which one can observe patterns and see things that might not be visible to the actors [participants]” (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997). The author further offers, “With voice in dialog, the portraitist purposely places herself in the middle of the action (in the field and in the text). She feels the symmetry of voice—hers and the actor’s—as they both express their views and together define meaning-making” (p.103). Through the interview process, the portraitist moves from thin to thick descriptions.

### **Elementary Administrator Interview Questions**

1. Describe how your school prepared to meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for the last two years?
2. Describe how most teachers reacted to increased accountability.
  - a. What are some of their perceptions?
  - b. Do they value the increased accountability?
3. Describe how you helped teachers to understand NCLB mandates.
4. Describe any organizational changes that were made to accommodate NCLB.

- a. How do you address the needed changes?
    - b. What if anything has improved due to the changes?
    - c. Describe how teachers perceived these changes.
  5. Describe the reading curriculum prior to the inception of NCLB.
    - a. Describe any changes.
    - b. Describe your perception of those changes for the organization.
  6. Describe a typical reading class prior to and after NCLB.
    - a. What is most beneficial?
    - b. What has been a “pothole” for changes made?
    - c. Describe the impact on reading.
  7. Describe staffing prior to and after NCLB.
  8. Describe your administrative style prior to and after the inception of NCLB.
    - a. What changes in leadership do you find most effective?
  9. Tell me how teachers react to the increasing performance targets.
    - a. How do you support the staff?
    - b. How do teachers perceive these increases for instruction?
  10. Describe the main barriers to implementing NCLB.
  11. How does the school adapt to the mandates of NCLB?
  12. Describe what you do differently as the performance targets increase?
  13. Describe the barriers you face to NCLB as the educational leader in your building.
    - a. What are your beliefs about student progress?
-

- b. Have your beliefs changed with NCLB?
- 14. Describe the changes have you made to the school, both physical and academically?
- 15. Describe how you communicate NCLB mandates to teachers.
- 16. Describe adaptations you have made to the organization of the school.
- 17. Describe changes to staffing, infrastructure, testing and curriculum.
  - a. Describe your belief about assessment.
  - b. Describe how changes in instruction have impacted PSSA scores.

### **Teacher Interview Questions**

- 1. Describe how you prepared to meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for the last two years?
- 2. Describe your reaction to increased accountability.
  - a. What are your thoughts about increased accountability?
  - b. Do you value the increased accountability?
- 3. Describe how your principal helped teachers to understand NCLB mandates.
- 4. Describe any changes that were made to accommodate NCLB in your school.
  - a. How does your principal address the needed changes?
  - b. What if anything has improved due to the changes?
  - c. Describe how you perceived these changes.

5. Describe the reading curriculum in your classroom prior to the inception of NCLB.
  - a. Describe any changes you made.
  - b. Describe how any change affects your classroom or school.
6. Describe a typical reading class prior to and after NCLB.
  - a. What is most beneficial?
  - b. What has been a “pothole” for you due NCLB.
  - c. Describe the impact on reading.
7. Describe staffing prior to and after NCLB.
8. Describe your principal’s administrative style prior to and after the inception of NCLB.
  - a. What changes in your principal’s leadership do you find most effective?
9. Tell me your feelings about the increasing performance targets.
  - a. How does your principal support the staff?
  - b. How do the increasing performance targets in reading affect instruction?
  - c. Describe the main barriers to implementing NCLB.
10. How do you adapt to the mandates of NCLB?
11. Describe what you do differently as the performance targets increase?
12. Describe the barriers you face to NCLB as the teacher in your classroom.
  - a. What are your beliefs about student progress?



- b. Have your beliefs changed with NCLB?
- 13. Describe the changes have you made to your classroom, both physical and academically?
- 14. Describe adaptations you have made to the organization of your classroom.
- 15. Describe any changes you have made to testing and the reading curriculum.
  - a. Describe your belief about assessment.
  - b. Describe how changes in instruction have impacted PSSA scores.

Table 6

*Matrix of Research Questions*

Research Questions	Interview Questions (Principals & Teachers)
<p>1. What obstacles do school administrators face as they implement the NCLB law?</p>	<p>1. Describe how your school prepared to meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for the last two years?</p> <p>4 Describe any organizational changes that were made to accommodate NCLB.            -How do you address the needed changes?            -What if anything has improved due to the changes?            -Describe how teachers perceived these changes.</p> <p>5. Describe the reading curriculum prior to the inception of NCLB.            -Describe any changes.            -Describe your perception of those changes for the organization.</p> <p>13. Describe the barriers you face to NCLB as the educational leader in your building.            -What are your beliefs about student progress?            -Have your beliefs changed with NCLB?</p>
<p>2. How do school administrators implement the specific components of NCLB?</p>	<p>2. Describe how most teachers reacted to increased accountability.            -What are some of their perceptions?            -Do they value the increased accountability?</p>

	<p>17. Describe changes to staffing, infrastructure, testing and curriculum.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Describe your belief about assessment.</li> <li>-Describe how changes in instruction have impacted PSSA scores.</li> </ul>
<p>3. What is the most dramatic change to administrative practice since the implementation of NCLB?</p>	<p>9. Tell me how teachers react to the increasing performance targets.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-How do you support the staff?</li> <li>-How do teachers perceive these increases for instruction?</li> </ul> <p>10. Describe the main barriers to implementing NCLB.</p> <p>11. How does the school adapt to the mandates of NCLB?</p>
<p>4. How do administrators adapt to increased mandates for accountability?</p>	<p>3. Describe how you helped teachers to understand NCLB mandates.</p> <p>6. Describe a typical reading class prior to and after NCLB.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-What is most beneficial?</li> <li>-What has been a “pothole” for you due NCLB.</li> <li>-Describe the impact on reading.</li> </ul> <p>7. Describe staffing prior to and after NCLB.</p> <p>12. Describe the barriers you face to NCLB as the teacher in your classroom.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-What are your beliefs about student progress?</li> <li>-Have your beliefs changed with NCLB?</li> </ul>

<p>5. How is organizational change affected by the contextual mandates of NCLB?</p>	<p>5. Describe the reading curriculum prior to the inception of NCLB.  - Describe any changes.  -Describe your perception of those changes for the organization.</p> <p>8, Describe your administrative style prior to and after the inception of NCLB.</p> <p>12, Describe what you do differently as the performance targets increase?</p> <p>14. Describe the changes have you made to the school, both physical and academically.</p> <p>15. Describe how you communicate NCLB mandates to teachers.</p>
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The Five Dimensions of Organizational Change Theory were used to frame the interview questions for administrators and teachers. Below is a matrix of the five dimensions and the interview questions that match each dimension. The interview questions are then aligned to the research questions for this study.

Table 7

*Senge's Five Dimensions of Organizational Change Matched to the Interview Questions*

Five Dimensions	Interview Questions
<p>Understanding the whole system</p>	<p>1. Describe how your school prepared to meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for the last two years?</p> <p>6. Describe a typical reading class prior to and after NCLB.                      -What is most beneficial?                      -What has been a "pothole" for you due NCLB.                      -Describe the impact on reading.</p> <p>10. Describe the main barriers to implementing NCLB.</p> <p>13. Describe the barriers you face to NCLB as the educational leader in your building.                      -What are your beliefs about student progress?                      -Have your beliefs changed with NCLB?</p> <p>17. Describe changes to staffing, infrastructure, testing and curriculum.                      -Describe your belief about assessment.                      -Describe how changes in instruction have affected PSSA scores.</p>

Shared vision	<p>4. Describe any organizational changes that were made to accommodate NCLB.  -How do you address the needed changes?  -What if anything has improved due to the changes?  -Describe how teachers perceived these changes.</p> <p>5. Describe the reading curriculum prior to the inception of NCLB.  -Describe any changes.  -Describe your perception of those changes for the organization.</p> <p>8. Describe your administrative style prior to and after the inception of NCLB.</p> <p>16. Describe adaptations you have made to the organization of the school.</p>
Personal mastery	<p>7. Describe staffing prior to and after NCLB.</p> <p>14. Describe the changes have you made to the school, both physical and academically.</p> <p>3. Describe how you helped teachers to understand NCLB mandates.</p>
	<p>2. Describe how most teachers reacted to increased accountability.</p>

<p>Mental models</p>	<p>-What are some of their perceptions?          -Do they value the increased accountability</p> <p>9. Tell me how teachers react to the increasing performance targets.          -How do you support the staff?          -How do teachers perceive these increases for instruction</p>
<p>Team learning</p>	<p>3. Describe how you helped teachers to understand NCLB mandates.</p> <p>12. Describe the barriers you face to NCLB as the teacher in your classroom.          -What are your beliefs about student progress?          -Have your beliefs changed with NCLB?</p> <p>15. Describe how you communicate NCLB mandates to teachers.</p> <p>17. Describe changes to staffing, infrastructure, testing and curriculum.          -Describe your belief about assessment.          -Describe how changes in instruction have affected PSSA scores.</p>

### **Data Analysis**

In this case study of public school administrators, the narrative was used to extract key words, themes and concepts. The data were examined within the

theoretical frame of organizational and individual change theory. In this particular study of three administrators and nine teachers in three different school districts in Central Pennsylvania, the art of portraiture allowed for mutual simultaneous shaping of factors with emerging themes and categories that could then be coded (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Straus and Corbin, 1990; Lincoln and Guba, 1984, 1990). The codes are tags or labels for assigning units of meaning to the descriptive information compiled during the data collection process. Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest it is not the words themselves, but the meaning that matters. One important part of developing themes is memoing, whereby the portraitist writes ongoing memos to trace the process of description and interpretation. The authors further state, "Memoing helps the analyst move easily from empirical data to a conceptual level, refining, and expanding codes further, developing key categories and showing their relationship, and building towards a more integrated understanding of events, processes, and interactions in the case" (pp. 158-159).

### **Pilot Study**

Once the case study was approved, the portraitist conducted a pilot study in one school district with three administrators and three teachers to revise, edit, and rethink interview questions and crosscheck for reliability. The portraitist needed to insure the interview questions were measuring what was intended in the case study. The data from the pilot study were analyzed using the same method as the case study. Senge's (2000) organizational change theory was used to frame the data after it had been transcribed and coded.



Evidence from the pilot study further guided the research procedure and research questions by identifying gaps or Interview questions that needed to be revised, added or deleted. The pilot study also was useful in eliminating confusing words and narrowing the focus on several interview questions to gather valid data. The pilot study also enhanced the researcher's experience of the interviewing process before gathering the primary data for the case study.

### **Limitations**

This case study was limited to three school districts in rural Central Pennsylvania. Also, the assessment data reviewed for student achievement were limited reading scores on the Pennsylvania School System Assessment test. Since the pool of respondents in this study was limited to three rural school districts, the findings cannot be generalized to other rural school districts or those administrators represented in other school districts.

### **Chapter Summary**

Chapter Three has discussed the tenets of case study research, the design of this study, the participants, how the data were collected and how the data were analyzed. Using semi-structured, open-ended questions allowed a more natural conversation and follow-up questions were used for in-depth clarification or redirection. Chapter Three articulated the framework for *The Art of Portraiture* categorizing and coding data and how the evidence converged to produce reliable findings.

There are existing studies of parents and teachers in regard to the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), whereby these studies glean both positive and

negative data. However, the perceived barriers for rural Pennsylvania administrators dealing with the mandates of NCLB had not been studied. Since there was a gap in the literature, this study is of value by adding additional information to individual and organizational change for schools as learning communities.

In Chapter Four, data are analyzed to establish credibility using all sources of data: interviews with administrators, and teachers, PSSA data, field notes and journal entries.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### DATA AND ANALYSIS

This qualitative case study used portraiture, an empirical process of gathering and synthesizing data to complete the portraits of three elementary administrators. The study examined the individual and organizational change experienced by school administrators in three rural Pennsylvania schools as they implemented the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) to gain Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). Specifically, the study sought to identify the elements that facilitate and impede the translation of National policy to local educational practices.

The portraitist (researcher) visited three rural elementary schools located in south central Pennsylvania. The participants in each school included the principal and three grade-level teachers who administer the Pennsylvania School System Assessment (PSSA), a standardized test required by the Pennsylvania Department of Education in grades three through eight and eleven. Each participant was interviewed with follow-up sessions as needed for clarification. Field notes were carefully collected along with demographic data and two consecutive years of PSSA scores in grades three through six. Qualitative data were collected to answer the research questions:

1. What obstacles (potholes) do elementary school administrators face as they implement the NCLB law?
2. What is the transition experience of building administrators as they implement the tenets of NCLB?

3. What is the most dramatic change to administrative practice since the implementation to NCLB?
4. How do administrators adapt to increased mandates for accountability?
5. How is organizational change affected by the contextual mandates of NCLB?

This chapter is divided into four sections. First, the portraits of the three principals are illuminated to give the reader insight into the organizational and individual change experienced by the administrators. Secondly, the administrator data are analyzed for common threads or patterns that are revealed in the stories of the elementary school principals. The data are then filtered and analyzed through the theoretical framework of Senge's (2000) using the five dimensions of systematic change found in *Schools That Learn*.

The sub-headings or the five dimensions in the principal portraits include: understanding the whole system, shared vision, personal mastery, mental models and team learning. For example, understanding the whole system is a powerful practice for finding the leverage needed to get the most constructive change; shared vision focuses on a mutual purpose by a group of individuals (teachers, administrators, and staff in a school). These individuals share a commitment to developing shared images. Personal mastery is a practice of articulating a coherent image of your personal vision. Along with realistic assessment, personal mastery produces a tension, expands your capacity to make better choices and results you want; mental model focuses around

developing awareness of attitudes and perceptions. Since most mental models are un-discussable and hidden from view, it is necessary to develop the capability to talk safely and productively about dangerous and discomforting subjects; team learning is a discipline of group interaction such as: dialogue, and skillful discussion to transform collective thinking, to mobilize energies and actions, and to achieve common goals. Also, threads or themes of disequilibrium are noted to enhance the portraits and further the notion of recommendations for future school administrators.

In the third section of Chapter 4, interview data from the teacher participants are analyzed to support or refute the portraits of the principals. Lastly, emerging themes that are universally common to both principals and teachers are expressed and noted for the implementation of NCLB.

The context of the data was crucial to documenting the human experience as the administrators implement the mandates of the No Child left Behind Act (NCLB). Context was used to place the participants in time and space as a resource for understanding what they say and do as school leaders to bring about Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) on the Pennsylvania School System Assessment (PSSA).

## **The School Administrators**

The three elementary school principals participating in the study were located in South Central Pennsylvania where the districts have a label of rural status. Each principal had a minimum of five years experience in the current position. Nine classroom teachers also participated in the study ranging from eight to nineteen years of teaching experience. The background and experiences of all participants were brought to light in the portrait of each principal.

All interviews were completed in one to two hours with several follow-up meetings for clarification. All participants invited the portraitist to the schools for their convenience. All interviews were audio taped in entirety and transcribed in forty-eight hours. During the interviews, the principals freely shared stories about themselves as educators and stories about the school in general. Field notes were kept by the portraitist to insure Lawrence-Lightfoot's description of rich portraits and Merriam's (1988) "thick rich descriptions."

### **The Portrait of Scott**

Scott is an elementary principal in rural South Central Pennsylvania in a school with 47% poverty. The student population of the district is 1,375 with a per pupil cost of instruction at \$11, 090. The school sits in a beautiful meadow that is just outside the small town. The district football field is located at one end of the meadow with swings and play equipment at the other end for the elementary students. There was only one way into the school campus as it sat on a dead-

end road. The small town is a place here folks were born and have stayed on to raise their children.

Upon entering the school, there was an aroma of cleaning solutions, ladders against the walls and custodians milling about. The lights were dimmed which made maneuvering around the obstacles rather challenging. Finding the office of the principal was yet another challenge. The layout of the building was done in a circular pattern with hallways jutting out from a large library. It was liken to spokes on a wheel. After making a few unsuccessful attempts to find the principal's office, a very cordial older woman custodian led the way.

On the intercom, the secretary called for the principal to report to the office. Scott, the principal, was neatly dressed and offered a hardy greeting with a firm handshake. His office was cramped with no windows for natural light. The décor was slightly out-dated, but neat and organized. Scott was upbeat and happy to talk about his school and staff. He was proud to expound on the accomplishments of the school.

Scott was a classroom teacher for nine years before he moved into administration. He happily shared his journey from the classroom to administration. Starting in fourth grade, Scott taught for nine years in the same building where the poverty level was 80%. Over several years, he was moved from one grade level to another as the need arose and the student population waned or grew. In his eighth year of teaching, Scott started a principal program at a local university where he studied for a year before doing an internship in a neighboring school district. After receiving a K-12 principal certification, he got

his first job as a principal in a very small Pennsylvania school district. Scott stayed for two years before moving to his current position where he has served for the last five years.

### **Understanding the Whole System**

To bring about change in the school for meeting Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), an understanding of the system as a whole is needed. PSSA and AYP put a tremendous amount of pressure on schools to perform at targeted levels. For the principal, knowing the system is a powerful practice for finding the leverage needed to get the most constructive change.

With reading as an emphasis for change and making performance targets, Scott talked about the school and the needs of the students. He discussed resources, reading materials and teachers.

During Scott's first few years in the school, he had teachers choose a new reading series to help support students with improved grade-level reading. He sought out teacher-leaders who were strong reading teachers to lead reading workshops.

Scott shared, "I restructured the reading classes and groups of kids...I had to change some things for the specific needs of the low reading ability students. I had to find a fit for each teacher and the building schedules had to change."

Trusting the teachers and giving them autonomy to address student needs was a means to support change in the reading program. Micro-managing was not a leadership style adopted by Scott. He stated, "I give them a direction and



let them loose. I pay close attention to what they are doing, but I give them freedom to fly.” To Scott it was like being a symphony director.

I’ve always seen myself in what a leader should be...like that of a symphony director. I’m the director of the symphony and I know what a good song sounds like. I see a good program and know what it looks like. I find those experts in their content areas and then we go.

Scott had a vision for the new reading program and student achievement.

To accomplish the goal, the vision was shared with staff members to create a student-centered environment for reading.

### **Shared Vision**

Sharing the vision of the school or a goal means all members of the school must be on board and aim for the same end. The idea that a school can learn has become increasingly prominent. It is clear that schools can be re-created and renewed by taking a learning orientation (Senge, et al, 2000). Fostering a commitment for a single purpose is a shared vision for the staff.

As Scott talked, he shook his head, smiled and gave a little chuckle. It was not easy for Scott to get all the staff agreeing on the vision for the students and the school. He brought staff together to look at data, lots of data. The performance targets for making AYP were discussed often. The staff then got together to formulate a plan to increase student achievement. They were proud of the school and they wanted the community to think well of them. Yet, there were resisters.

Scott asked for volunteers for certain grade levels and committees to review curricula and programs to create buy-in. “There is not much I can do to bring in more staff as I would like to do. We are stretched with the budget.”

With a sigh and shaking his head, Scott was thinking about the budget. He was truly committed to creating a core purpose for the school; a purpose that would benefit the students and the community. He had a vision for implementing NCLB and making AYP along with the teachers mastering the skills necessary for best reading practices.

### **Personal Mastery**

Making the NCLB mandates clear to the staff was a challenge for Scott. Communication was done through faculty meetings with little time for discussion. He used email and some grade level meetings to bring about a discussion of the law and what the school was expected to do to continue to make AYP. For cultivating aspirations and creating an awareness of best practices in reading, Scott used professional development as a means to confront the mandates of NCLB. He was able to make changes because the law indicated the performance targets and he had data to back up the need for change. Scott reported:

I shared with the staff the parts of the law that talk about all students and how parents must be involved in the education process. We had an in-service day...so we spent a lot of time talking about the standards and eligible content in each grade level.

As if contemplating the plans that were already in place, Scott spoke in a slow deliberate style. He wanted to convey the message about a lack of training the teachers had in guided reading. Yet, he did not want to seem demeaning to them or lacking in leadership. But, he understood some teachers were unsure of how to manage guided reading. Scott brought in a reading coach from another district, purchased videos on guided reading procedures and bought books for

the teachers' library. "I know this is not the best way to provide professional training, but my budget can only stretch so far. There is a building to maintain also."

To convey the goal, Scott encouraged the staff to focus on the outcome for the students. He wanted them to see student achievement rising, PSSA scores growing and all the students reading on level.

### **Mental Models**

Developing an awareness of attitudes and perceptions comes from the discipline of reflection and inquiry skills. Senge, et al (2000) discusses the fact that mental models can help more clearly define current reality. In education it is helpful to have the capability to talk safely about discomforting subjects. One teacher's perception of an issue can be totally different from another teacher's view of the same topic. Two types of skills, according to Senge, are important in forming mental models. First, one must reflect and slow down thinking. Second, is inquiry; the ability to hold conversations where views are openly shared.

To bring about the vision that was formulated for the school, Scott brought learning teams together to support and discuss the reality that AYP was getting harder to achieve with the performance targets rising in subsequent school years.

With a very concerned look, Scott started by explaining the strengths and weakness of NCLB. He worried about student achievement and the teachers' view or the plan for instruction. Scott felt that NCLB had caused a lot of good things to happen with education. Analyzing data and having a standards- based

curriculum in education for each grade level was good for students. However, Scott felt the flaw was in the accountability system and the punitive consequences of failing to meet AYP.

Special education students form a sub-group if the school has forty or more students labeled as special education. “These students have learning disabilities, yet they are supposed to perform like regular education students.” Scott wanted teachers to see the vision for success for all students. He wanted a level playing field for all students and a fair way to assess proficiency on the PSSA test. “They’re [lawmakers] seeing our kids as a factory-produced item. That’s now how it is.”

To help students succeed, teachers came up with grade level rubrics. The rubric is a list of five things the students can think about before taking the PSSA. The encouragement by the staff helped the students to gain confidence in their work and success on the PSSA. Because of a combination of changes, “The entire staff was collaborating and working together.”

### **Team Learning**

According to Senge, et al (2000), teaming can be defined as transforming individual skills into collective thinking and acting. Staff acting together for a common goal in the school is a practice designed to bring about change. Teams can be formed for curriculum, grade levels, staff development, teaching practices and developing resources; just to name a few.

Scott was proud of how his teams were coming together to revise the reading curriculum. In departments, such as, primary and intermediate, the

teachers were analyzing data and aligning the curriculum to benefit the students. He leaned forward in his chair as he began, “The grade-level teams meet once a month and then I asked them to schedule a meeting with me every three to four weeks. I want to know how things are going. The literacy coach is part of the teams and adds to the discussion with each grade level. In the meetings we talk about best practices and curriculum.”

Scott encourages the teams to work together and he supports collaborative learning. If the teams worked on curriculum alignment or watched the guided reading videos for two hours, he awarded the staff Act 48 credit toward their teacher certification requirements.

If I get them all on the same page, I can change the way reading happens in this building. Remember, I give them some latitude to experiment and try things out...if they make mistakes, well they learn from them.

While Scott tries to comply with NCLB, he finds it a challenge for scheduling and working with a limited budget to supply the staff with needed resources. Student learning is foremost in his mind, but there are problems [potholes] that sometimes make it difficult to implement the tenets of the law.

### **Potholes**

Using the terms “potholes” and “bumps in the road” (Hall & Hord, 2006) to ask Scott about the problems with implementing the mandates of NCLB; there was a jolly roar of laughter.

NCLB is one big pothole! And, there are so many bumps. This law is the law and there is nothing I can do but try to conform. They ask us to do so much and to change so many things. There is no time to get it all done. My scheduling gets very creative. I don't want to cut out the arts. You know-- music, chorus and such.

One pothole for Scott is the requirement to have a certified ESL (English as a Second Language) teacher on staff. The cost to the district is enormous and for his school there were only two ESL students. While Scott strives to be a visionary leader, his resources and teachers are stretched. “I find myself defending teachers to the parents when, in fact, they are only doing the job that is required by NCLB.”

Scott sees a real bump in the road for the students. “School isn’t fun for them. We have taken away all the fun things that keep the kids engaged. The testing and assessment that we do all year to collect data is a ‘downer’ for them. They just get tired of it.”

The budget is the real pothole for Scott and his school. “I’m paying for testing now that I’ve never had to pay for before.” For Scott, the testing costs take away from other necessary resources and materials. At Scott’s school, Title I funds have been reduced which makes the budget even tighter. Materials are needed for all the curricular areas, but reading and math take priority in the budget. Unfunded mandates in NCLB cause a strain on the school budget and make things difficult. “If something is unfunded and I’m being asked to do all these extra things, I guess the overall biggest impact is that it is changing the funding source.” Scott is stressed that the unfunded mandates of NCLB impact the general funds, which in turn affects other programming in his school.

### **Teacher Responses Shaping the Portrait of Scott**

The teachers in Scott’s building had various years of teaching experience and all three teachers interviewed had administered the PSSA assessment for

three or more years. While their responses to the interview questions validate the portrait of Scott, there were a few disconnections.

### **Understanding the Whole System**

The teachers understood that making AYP was of the utmost importance for students mastering the Pennsylvania academic standards. Change in reading and the structure of reading was necessary. Because Scott had educated the staff about NCLB and the need for change, the teachers offered insight to the reading program. They talked about placing students in groups for guided reading based on student need and how data drive instruction.

Knowing and understanding the reading curriculum, the teachers shared some strategies used for student achievement. They were aware of the AYP status and the data that correlated to the test. The increase in accountability made them somewhat apprehensive, yet they agreed that accountability was needed. One teacher shared, “We’ll gather resources from the PSSA web site and books that we’ve gathered and make up packets and just hit the kids with how to take the test, how to analyze the questions, and then just review the vocabulary and the comprehension skills they’re going to need.”

All the teachers agreed on the importance of the reading program, staff and the change that could boost student achievement. While the fourth grade teacher echoed the need for change, she also shared beliefs about accountability and the state assessment system. “I have no problem with increased accountability. I feel that everyone involved in a child’s education (from the students and parents to the teachers/administrators) should be held

accountable.” However, this teacher was not in favor of students being held accountable for grade-level work when they had a learning disability and were required by the Individual Education Plan (IEP) to be instructed at their current ability level, not grade level. This statement supported those thoughts of Scott as the educational leader in the building.

Reflecting on change in the building, the teachers noted that the number of staff in the building did not change, but duties of the teachers and the organization of the grade levels had changed. They felt stretched with little time to do adequate instruction in content other than reading and math.

### **Shared Vision**

The teaching staff appear to be sharing the goal of increased student achievement and meeting AYP. However, for some teachers it is difficult to change from the comfort zone to the mandates of NCLB. The disconnect of a shared vision was evident from one teacher’s input. “I don’t do as many projects as I would like to do. Come January or February I would love to teach the Iditarod. But, sometimes it gets shoved aside because we have to get ready for the test.” Scott knew there was resistance among some staff members and this teacher supported that notion.

However, the staff as a whole shared the vision of the core purpose of change and a learning environment conducive to student achievement. They are living with the policy and accepting the goal to meet the demands of increased accountability and meeting AYP. Sue, one of the teachers, added, “Our staff is instructing and putting forth one hundred percent in an effort to educate students



to become the best they can be.” Sharing the vision or the reading goals for the students was very important to most of the staff. The teachers felt more targeted and had aligned the reading curriculum for student success. “I think we’re focused a lot more in getting the kids to read more. So I think that was a positive change.” The teachers followed Scott’s lead to understand where they need to go to insure proficiency.

### **Personal Mastery**

To under-go the instructional and organizational changes of the school and to understand the mandates of NCLB, the principal played a pivotal role in informing and communicating the tenets of NCLB along with the demands placed on the students, staff, and the school. It became a priority to master NCLB and the demands of PSSA. To create a better understanding and a relationship between teachers and the curriculum, Scott held meetings and communicated to staff on a regular basis. Two teachers shared some of the ways Scott informed and supported the staff.

The teachers talked about after-school meetings that were mandated to keep updated on NCLB. “He informs us. I like the fact that he gives us time to incubate, to internalize on how we’re going to accomplish this instead of demanding something right away.” The teachers shared stories about faculty meetings and getting together in teams to make decisions and plans on how address PSSA.

To master the reading curriculum, Scott also sent teachers to learn best practices in reading. For example, guided reading was done in the train-the-

trainer method to utilize the budget in an economic means. Training or professional development was one way to reach the goal.

### **Mental Models**

To insure a goal or vision is carried through, it is imperative to create a mental model using two skills. First, those people involved in the vision must reflect and slow down thinking regarding the process of the goal. Secondly, they must use inquiry to hold conversations where views and opinions are openly shared. The fourth grade teacher began her story of using a mental model for the outcome on adequate yearly progress. “I can see the plan.” She shared ways to break down skills for students, how to group students and make changes to lessons to cover the required material. “We adapt all day, every day.” However, she confessed that all the teachers do not always agree. Her motto was being flexible and adapting to her students. “In my mind, I reflect on my students and the data that I have collected. I don’t group them according to that. I teach them and give them what they need.”

Thinking and reflecting happen with the grade-level staff on a weekly basis. If concerns surface, the teachers pound out the details of how to overcome the issues and continue toward the goal for the students and the school. Although there may be disconnections between the goal and the staff, the building principal helps to focus the group toward the vision’s end.

### **Team Learning**

The staff in Scott’s building began teaming as a way to bring individual instruction and skills into a collective group for increased student achievement on

the Pennsylvania Academic Standards. While teaming caused disequilibrium at first, ongoing collaboration among teachers brought on a sense of collegiality. Teachers got comfortable analyzing data, revising the reading curriculum and putting the individual needs of the students first. The fifth grade teacher explained the procedure used in the building for improving student scores and looking closely at best practices and curriculum. “We have team meetings to discuss what we can do to make proficiency with the data given to us by the principal.” She talked about how the teams keep data notebooks that show relationships between the curriculum and the students’ needs. When students are identified as needing extra help, they are given extra time and instruction to master a concept. The teacher liked the teaming aspect as they look at students based on the data.

While Scott sees himself as promoting the team concept and a hands-off leader, one teacher refuted that idea. “Scott is a very hands-on principal. He has to know everything you’re doing.” However, she did mention that Scott often says that he chooses the best people to work in the school and trusts them to do the very best for the students. Another teacher commented about how Scott allows them freedom to generate instructional material and create lessons to match the ability levels of the students. Another teacher said, “Scott is the leader. He trusts us to make professional decisions.”

The grade-level teams learned as a group to look at students differently, use the data to drive instruction, revise the reading curriculum and to address individual student needs.

But, the teachers willingly offered details regarding the pitfalls or “potholes” in the mandates brought to them by the NCLB Act. Being asked to implement the law was not an easy process. There were stumbling blocks associated with making AYP and maintaining that status.

### **Potholes**

The staff was more than willing to discuss the potholes or issues that impede curriculum and instruction. When the portraitist asked what were the main barriers to implementing NCLB, the fourth grade teacher replied, “Everything! Time, money, class size, teacher training, and parents not helping with homework.”

The fifth grade teacher was thoughtful and took several minutes to reply to the question. Her face was sullen and pensive as she answered the question.

First and foremost, not all of the students are being tested at grade level. Getting learning support students ready to take a grade level reading test is absurd! But, time is another barrier. It is necessary that we use our own time (time outside of the school day) to study the data and generate the needed instructional material.

These statements echoed the thoughts of Scott as a deep concern for the students ability level and the stress placed on teachers and teacher morale.

The sixth grade teacher discussed barriers that she faces in her classroom.

Scott says he can't buy all the books and supplies I need for my class because of the budget. I am supposed to teach all levels of students and get them to pass the PSSA, but how can I do this without the things I need to facilitate learning?

All the teachers agreed there is no time to stop and enjoy learning! Kids are frustrated and shut down due to testing and pressure to perform.

## Portrait of Trish

Trish is an elementary principal in South Central Pennsylvania in a school with 50% poverty. The student population of the district is 1,466 with a per pupil cost of instruction at \$10,371. The district is labeled as rural with an industry of various types of farms. Some farms raise beef cattle, some raise hogs and yet others are dairy farms.

The day was bright and sunny with a slight warm breeze driving to the school building to meet Trish. The school was only one year old with brightly colored trim and bearing the district mascot on the front of the building. The entrance was very inviting with floor-to-ceiling windows bringing in lots of natural light and was decorated as replica of an old original town with lamp poles and old street signs. After being announced as a visitor for Trish, the secretary led the way to a large office with an abundance of natural light. The room was quite inviting with comfortable seating and a conference table for meetings. The walls were lined with book shelves and neatly stocked with a variety of children's books and memorabilia. This principal was quite a dog lover from the evidence on the shelves.

Trish is perky woman, small in stature, and gave a cordial greeting. It was evident that she loved the school. First off, she offered a tour of the building to show the classrooms and the state-of-the-art technology. She stated, "You should know that I am the resident tour guide for the school. I love this part of my job."

Each room was equipped with wireless Internet, smart boards, projectors, TVs, microphones, computers, teaching stations and ultra modern teacher desks...even the lights turned themselves off if there was no motion in the room. The library was also breathtaking with an extremely large variety of books for all students. The building also housed a large group instructional room that was set with arena-style seating. After the tour, it was back to her office where she offered some refreshments. "So you're here to discuss how my school meets AYP. I'll be happy to give you some information." We sat at a very comfortable table where the first of several question were asked.

### **Understanding the Whole System**

The process of understanding PSSA and the technical interpretation of the assessment is a necessary part of the leadership role in a school building. The calculations to measure AYP are rather daunting and include: Safe Harbor, Pennsylvania Performance Index Confidence Interval (Definition of Terms) and the performance targets. The principal must understand the scoring procedure to evaluate student achievement on the test. Since the PSSA is such a punitive test, principals do not want to have their schools labeled as "in need of improvement."

A very poised and self-confident Trish began her story about her reading goal. She understood NCLB and the requirements and the mandates associated with the law.

I must live with this law [NCLB]. I understand what we need to do to make the students successful. Now it hasn't been easy, but making AYP and success on the PA academic standards is a goal for this school. Of course reading is the main objective.

During her beginning years as the principal, Trish lead a change to the reading program. “In the beginning, the classroom teacher was not really responsible for the struggling readers. It was the Title I reading teacher who was going to fix them. “Trish felt that everyone was responsible for the child as a reader. She supports a balanced literacy classroom, where the room is literature rich.

The balanced literacy approach supports learning centers, authentic literature, and authentic literature activities such as reading and writing. Trish is a proponent of guided reading for individualized instruction and was eager to talk about the reading program. Shared-reading and writing were among Trish’s highlights of the program. The teachers use many ‘big books,’ read alouds, and skill building to enhance comprehension. They quickly address at-risk students through immediate intervention strategies. “We have students that go to intervention groups, Tier 2 or Tier 3, reading intervention groups depending on how at-risk they are... but, not during reading time. All students are all involved in the core curriculum; special education students, regular educational students, at risk students; all students.”

This principal understood the impact of rising reading performance targets and the need to make AYP. She only wanted the teachers to focus on what was good for all students and follow the standards to do so.

Trish put her hand to her chin as she contemplated discussing the staffing needs and several changes with the staff. She was thoughtful and chose her

words carefully out of respect for the teachers on her staff. Trish responded, “Most of my staff has been great about gearing up for PSSA and understanding what is necessary for student success and accountability to the state. However, I do have resisters.” Some teachers in the building felt the state test was not a good assessment. The teachers didn’t like the idea of the one test, one snapshot, and when there was so much accountability built into that one day. These staff members were some of the resisters in the building. Trish also understood the system and the effects on the special education students, especially those students that had learning disabilities. “Even though they may be in fourth grade and reading on a level below, we give them the fourth grade test.”

### **Shared Vision**

Trish had a goal in mind for the school... a vision of reading success for all students. According to Hall & Hord (2006), “The goal of increased student outcomes results from specific changes or innovations that are selected for adoption and implementation (p.190). A shared vision is clearly defined and possible and there must be continuous communication about the vision or goal. “When there is a shared vision, facilitators can be consistent in supporting individuals and groups” (Hall & Hord, p. 192).

With a slight smile and very assuredly, Trish continued sharing what happens in her school. She talked about taking the reading program from a basal series to a balanced approach and aligning the reading program with the Pennsylvania academic standards. This principal gathered data and shared the



information with the staff to support concrete evidence for change. She helped teachers recognize weaknesses in the program and discussed individual student needs. Through these efforts, Trish slowly got buy-in for the reading program goals. However, there were some staff members who resisted.

She found it difficult to know what they were resisting. Some staff members were self-learners and were willing to do anything. Some teachers were leaders. Then there were some who needed a lot of support to reach the reading goals. “They didn’t necessarily want to go backwards, but it was difficult.”

To create buy-in, Trish asked for several volunteers in different grade levels and several teachers offered to help. These teachers went to some professional development workshops to learn guided reading, Kid Writing©, and how to level books. As teachers gain confidence, “There was a buzz about what was happening.” Trish pulled grade-level teams of teachers together to talk about balanced literacy and how it is a better strategy for the kids. The teacher-leaders began answering questions and invited others to visit the classrooms to see what was happening. “Colleagues were giving support to each other.”

### **Personal Mastery**

Personal mastery is seen as the practice of clarifying and making personal vision more precise, identifying what each individual wants in his or her personal participation in the organization (Hall & Hord, 2006, p.22). Beliefs in the vision set a direction for action (Schlechty, 2001). This action was necessary for Trish to convey the goal for student reading success. Talking about the staff, Trish

shared the changes she made to increase communication with the teachers and to monitor the vision. With a sense of self-confidence, Trish began telling the journey about change in the building.

I have twenty-four teachers in my building and I have hired fourteen of them. It's significant. I have a different relationship with staff that I hire. You talk about changing the culture of your building; that's really something that administrators need to invest in. And by invest, I mean by way of using the system that's in place; the fair process that's in place for unsatisfactory teachers or teachers that need improvement. It's a lot of work and you need a lot of staying power, but administrators need to do that for their kids.

Trish is a believer in getting the right people on board; to hire the right teachers to impact students. "We had to get the right teachers." Promoting a culture of learning is paramount for Trish and her vision for reading success. It was necessary for teachers to be moved and some staff to be changed. Teacher evaluation became a priority for Trish.

She made changes to the special education program by moving special needs students into the regular classroom and implementing Response to Intervention (RtI). RtI is a type of differentiated instruction model whereby students receive varying levels of intervention, known as Tiers, for a reading disability. All students are served no matter what the problem.

Trish is a leader with a passion. She believes every student can learn, but it may take many ways for them to do so. Her vision is clear and she communicates the goal on a daily basis. As a serious educator, Trish's face took on a look of determination as she spoke, "There was criticism and significant resistance. I had a teacher say to me that she did not go to school to be a

special education teacher. She was one who did not embrace the change as did some of her colleagues.”

Through communication and a lot with the staff meetings, email, grade-level meetings, in-service days and team days, Trish reinforced the goal for the students and the school. She made changes to the bus schedule to gain more instructional time and carved out time for at-risk students. As the teaching staff saw her passion for student achievement, they became more involved with the vision.

### **Mental Models**

“The use of mental models involves separating what has truly been observed from the assumptions and generalizations that people make based on their observations” (Hall & Hord, 2006, p. 22). Trish had the new reading program outlined in her mind. She had drawn a timeline for change and made a goal for increased reading success for the students. While the goal was clear to her, she said the state test was causing problems with how the teachers viewed accountability. Trish looked at the data and recognized the need for the reading program and successful progress. Accountability, however, was not viewed as a good thing by all teachers. Some teachers appear to balk at test scores and make excuses for the low scores. “There is a comfort zone using the old basal series. That is the way some teachers were trained. But, the research now points to more innovated strategies and programs for reading acceleration.”

The balanced reading program for Trish was the way to proceed to insure reading success. The five components of reading, phonological awareness,

phonemic awareness, decoding, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension, could be better addressed and serve students better if taught at the instructional level through guided reading. Trish continued with her story and almost laughed when she explained one teacher's reaction. "I had one teacher come to my office to visit. She said, "I'm not doing it." She thought that the balanced literacy program was just this impulsive decision that was made without any thinking and without any planning or discussion."

The balanced literacy program took a lot of talking and education for the program, but eventually all the teachers began to accept the change. For Trish, creating grade-level learning teams helped "seal the deal."

### **Team Learning**

According to Hall & Hord, (2006) and Senge (2001), team learning is the activity of coming together to discuss and to learn with and from each other. "Developing team learning skills involves each individual balancing his or her own goals and advocacy to achieve collaborative decision-making that serves the well-being of all" (Hall & Hord, 2006, p.22). Trish developed a transition for change using a team concept in several ways. By bringing the grade levels together to review data, the teachers clearly saw the need for differentiated instruction. The staff began with class data and moved up to the other types of assessment data. The staff has data analysis meetings three times per year. Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) assessment is done three times yearly; followed that with the core assessment and then a data analysis meeting day is scheduled. The grade-level teachers analyze data for

guided reading groups, independent reading, acceleration and intervention. The data are checked against benchmarks for each grade and content. Everybody on a grade level sits down together with Trish, the director of special education, and the school psychologist to talk about students. All students are carefully assessed using the data at hand. They include: at-risk students, Tier II and Tier III students, special education students and regular education students. The team meetings have been a critical piece for meeting the goals.

Schlechty (2001) purports, "Strong leaders in a modern organization know how to lead in a participatory environment where shared decision-making and teams are the rule rather than the exception" (p. 203). Not only did Trish create grade-level teams, she sought out teacher-leaders to guide the groups. At first, "politically powerful" teachers (a term used by Trish to indicate teachers who are respected for their experience and knowledge-base) were asked to chair team meetings and suggest changes. At that point, trust was established to let the staff go with the new literacy program. Evaluation of the program was left to the teacher experts who then reported to the principal. These grade-level teams gave insight into root cause analysis or knowing the 'why' behind low scores on the PSSA. They looked at the program, the resources, the teaching and the grouping to make decisions about the students. While Trish is always there to support, teaming has been the answer to getting everyone on board for student success in reading.

Trish tries to comply with the guidelines set forth by the Pennsylvania Department of Education who interprets the No Child Left Behind Act. The

mandates are spelled out in the law for performance targets, English language learners, the sub-group populations and the content. At times, Trish finds the mandates challenging for the school, teachers and students and thus she runs into bumps and potholes. “But, dealing with NCLB, PDE, and the law has not been easy for us. Oh, and then there is the budget issue.”

### **Potholes**

While implementing the No Child Left Behind Act, there are problems for Trish with implementation. When asked about the problems she faces, there was a sigh and shrugged shoulders as she responded.

“Here we are; we have to abide by what the state throws at us. We’ve had some potholes and we’ve has some struggles. With these mandates, I need more professional development. Teachers need support with reading and instructional methods to further student achievement.

The principal feels having a young staff is a pothole because they have families at home and that is a problem for after-school meetings and summer workshops. Trish feels this pothole is not recognized or known by state and national leaders. Time is needed for teachers. “I need time for teachers to explore, expand lessons, and get comfortable with the changes I’ve made.” The teachers complain about time and how everything is compacted to cover all that is required.

The principal and the teachers report that when substitute teachers come to the building, they are untrained in many of the learning strategies used and this can be a real setback to the students and slow down the curriculum. “We

have so much material to cover before the PSSA test in the spring and if a substitute is in for a teacher for any length of time, wow, it can be devastating.”

In addition, the budget can be the real big issue. “The state does not give us money. They say ‘here is the law’ now follow it. Not only do I need funds for professional development, I had to hire an English as a second language teacher (ESL teacher). “I do not have any ESL students in my building.” Like Scott, Trish reports the one real pothole is the one the kids fall into.

What are we doing to them? The students are told they must hit the proficient mark in reading and math. Some of these kids worry and make themselves sick. School isn’t fun...learning should be fun, engaging, and exciting. We teach concepts and practice those concepts to pass the test. Not good.

### **Teacher Responses Shaping the Portrait of Trish**

The teacher-participants in Trish’s building have given the PSSA test for five or more years. They have a wide range of teaching experience and have taught in the same grade levels for five or more years. Their responses serve to shape the portrait of Trish and add validity to the study and the emerging themes.

### **Understanding the Whole System**

Making adequate yearly progress (AYP) is a point of discussion for the teachers in Trish’s building. They understand that their students must achieve proficiency on the Pennsylvania academic standards and master the eligible content. With reading as the focus for change, the fourth grade teacher related the following. “We concentrate on reading and the balanced reading program.” She discussed at-risk learners and how teaching on their instructional level showed promise for success and how using a comprehensive program added

interest and confidence for students. Trish's vision for a researched reading program provided a heterogeneous class with the curriculum aligned with the standards. Teachers created lessons and learning centers to support the vision. "We use guided reading lessons to target specific skills at all levels, and began a new writing program to connect reading and writing. We also changed the way our RtI [Response to Intervention] groups were taught to accommodate more students in need."

The fifth grade teacher offered her insight to the reading program as it is presently being conducted. She reports the students are becoming better readers when she teaches various skills and concepts that are tied to the standards using differentiated instruction and various means of assessments. The three participants discussed communication between them and the principal and how well they understood NCLB. "She is always there to answer questions or give us updates on what we have to do for our students."

### **Shared Vision**

It is necessary for the staff to share the vision of a new and improved reading program; to come together with a collaborative goal for increased student achievement and making AYP. They are aware of the punitive consequences of NCLB and the impact on the students and the community. "Our principal has been at the forefront of change. She researches new programs and constantly looks for ways to increase student learning." This teacher offered how the principal asks for volunteers to pilot new programs, try new ideas and materials, and train other teachers in new methods. She talked about schedule changes



and how time was carved out of the day for the low ability readers. “Our schedules have been changed and modified to allow for longer periods of learning without interruption. Trish is serious about creating good readers.”

With the continual increase in AYP, the staff understood the importance of proficient reading and their obligation to the students and the community. “We know that not all students are able to learn at the same rate as their peers. I am continually looking for ways to keep these students learning and interested when material is very difficult for them.”

“The changes the principal has made have paid off so far.” The students in this school were scoring well on both parts of the PSSA and well above the cutoff for AYP. As the percentages for the performance targets increase toward 100%, the teachers see the school continuing to make progress because they believe in the goal. “If we fail to make AYP, it won’t be from lack of effort from the students, teachers, or the district.”

Jan offered this insight to the balanced literacy program and how scheduling had changed for her. She validates organizational changes made by Trish as she faces the implementation of NCLB.

With the new reading program, I see the children being exposed to many different genres in reading which create more interest in reading. To accommodate all the grouping needed for guided reading, our schedules had to be changed throughout the school.

It has made much longer afternoons for the fourth and fifth graders. Reading and writing have been scheduled for later in the afternoon...not always the best time to learn in my opinion.

However, we now allow the students to bring a snack for the afternoon. We found it gave them a quick break and helped to keep them more focused later in the day.

While the fourth grade teacher sees the vision as a good one and can align herself with Trish, the new reading program, and the PSSA, the fifth grade teacher sees a disconnection. She is not convinced that making AYP is an accurate indication of success.

Many students don't perform well on the PSSA just due to test anxiety. Others are "good guessers" and score higher than expected. I believe districts should be given a wider variety of assessments, especially in the elementary grades and for students identified with lower IQ's and learning disabilities. There is something wrong with placing all achievement levels in one test.

The resistance on the part of this teacher is felt by the other grade level teachers and Trish. She reluctantly uses the balanced reading program even though her peers see value in the program and have data to prove its success. Mastering the instructional changes in reading are varied and require a lot of support for some staff.

### **Personal Mastery**

To accomplish the goal of increased reading success for all students in the school, the teachers needed to change from the old basal series to the balanced reading program. "When the changes began, we were informed and had discussions at in-services. The staff was encouraged to ask questions and meet with Trish whenever necessary. To master the balanced reading program some physical classroom changes were made. Interactive white boards were added, along with moveable rugs for shared reading. Kidney shaped tables were bought for guided reading and conferencing and an area was constructed for small group instruction.

The new literacy program took on a new face. “We have added a half-day third grade teacher for language arts. The instructional aides throughout the elementary building have seen their roles change to include reading.”

While talking about the changes, the fourth grade teacher added some insight to the principal and how she was driven by the vision for the school.

Trish is supportive of us. She comes in to my class to observe guided reading and sometimes she will write up suggestions. She tells us to visit her anytime to discuss issues or talk about some of the changes. But, you know, she trusts us. She makes me feel like a professional and listens to my opinions. She reminds us about the reading goals, PSSA and making AYP. As a team we are striving for good results.

The focus is on all the students gaining reading ability. The collegiality among most of the staff has brought about a learning community to master guided reading and the new approach to the teaching of reading.

The fifth grade teacher discussed some of the changes that were made with her grade-level team. Yet, she sees a disconnection with what she does in the classroom and making AYP.

My kids do well in my class. They read all kinds of books and take accelerated reader quizzes. PSSA is only one day. All we do is worry about PSSA. There doesn't seem to be enough time for the “fun” things like arts & crafts, music, plays that we used to have time to do. I do what the principal tells me I have to do and work with my team; I just don't know why that test is so important.

### **Mental Models**

The new balanced literacy program was well designed and thought out. A timeline had been set for implementation as the pilot programs began throughout the building. Volunteers first added guided reading and then vocabulary and word study. As these teachers progressed with professional development and gained

a knowledge-base for literacy, more classrooms were added. The principal had a plan and the teachers could see that plan unfold.

In mental models, two skills are necessary. The first skill is reflection. The teachers in Trish's school could reflect on the goal and take time to acclimate to the process. The second skill is inquiry. Here the teachers had the chance to hold open conversations to discuss opinions and give their views on the goal. Several teachers discussed accountability as part of the reading program. They valued accountability and felt every teacher and parent should be accountable. "We all keep talking and working to get this thing right. Trish made gradual changes by having volunteers pilot the new reading program in various grade levels. "Gosh, we hold meetings to air any problem that we have. And, sometimes we don't all agree."

As each participant talked about the literacy program and having to deal with NCLB, all of them relied on the team for support and validation of carrying the program out with fidelity. The timeline for the program was visible and they could visualize the plan unfolding.

### **Team Learning**

The staff in Trish's building began teaming as an outcome of the pilot reading programs. As a group, they analyzed student data, talked about literacy and literacy acquisition. They reviewed the old basal series and then realigned the curriculum with the Pennsylvania Academic Standards. As grade-level teams, they looked at individual student needs and created lessons with those needs in mind. When asked about the teams, the fourth grade teacher stated, "Our

principal is very involved and knowledgeable. She is always looking for new and old ways to reach our students and make sure they are successful.” This teacher shared the fact that Trish respected them as professionals and recognized teachers with reading expertise. The teams were created based on the expertise of some to train those with less experience and knowledge.

In the team meetings, conversations were centered on how all students could learn. The team talked about learning styles, ability levels and instruction. “The grade-teams keep us all consistent with the curriculum and instruction. We get to know all the students by analyzing the data from the class tests and the PSSA scores. Rtl also helps and we all get to give our opinion at those team meeting.”

The participants agree that teaming is good for the students, as well as the realigned curriculum for each grade level. But, they also relayed the “potholes” while working on the building goal and making AYP.

### **Potholes**

While the mandates of the No Child Left Behind Act appear to be good for all students and schools, there are bumps that make implementation a challenge. The teachers were eager to relate the pitfalls to success on the PSSA and making AYP. The fourth grade offered this:

The time crunch gets to me. I am on a roller coaster from August to April getting ready for the PSSA. I don’ have time to take a breath. I am always on the go to create meaningful programs. But, not all the kids get it.

The fifth grade teacher stated:

The biggest barrier is teaching low-level students. They need and deserve more time to learn and different materials and activities to learn. Finding time to work with them as well as make learning meaningful to the average and higher learners is very difficult.

For the lower ability students, the teachers were continually looking for ways to keep these students learning and interested when material is very difficult for them. Time for research and planning was a definite pothole. The perception among the staff was the regular classroom teacher was stretched and in need of materials to adequately address student needs.” Materials and resources were definitely a barrier to success for the staff. “Sometimes the district does not have money to buy the supplies I need to teach the low kids.”

One of the teachers saw lack of knowledge for teaching special education students as a barrier to success. “I need some training in dealing with special education students. Not all the reading training I’ve had works with special needs students.” All the teachers agreed that class size, time, money and training are the potholes they see with this law.

### **Portrait of Barb**

Barb is an elementary principal in South Central Pennsylvania in a school with 42% poverty. The student population of the district is 1,897 with a per pupil cost of instruction at \$10,144. The district is labeled as rural with a large industry in farming and dairy farms.

Driving up to the school, it was evident that the building was very old. The structure of a two-story school building was faced with fading red brick and large limestone building blocks. The bricks were in need of re-striking with headers

and stone window sills cracked. Walking up two flights of stairs to the main entrance, the corner stone was visible: Built 1937.

Entering the building, the office area was not visible. The halls were littered with boxes, equipment, supplies and a sundry of other objects. Meandering through the halls, the office came into view with one secretary on duty at the only desk in the room. Barb came out from a small room behind the office to say hello. With a giggle, she laughed, "Don't mind the mess. We can find a seat somewhere." After exchanging hellos, Barb began to share her journey in education.

Barb had a start in education as substitute teacher for two years before being hired as a fifth grade teacher in the district where she is now the principal. Barb was moved around to several of the elementary buildings on an as-needed basis for about five years. As she stated, "I was low on the totem pole." When the opportunity presented itself for a teacher to be trained as a Reading Recovery© teacher, Barb willingly volunteered. She had received her Master's degree in reading during her two years as a substitute. Not only did Barb have a BS in elementary education, she also received a certification in early childhood. Barb went on to teach Title I reading and reading recovery for four more years. With teaching and a newborn at home, Barb said, "I needed at least one night out of the house." To satisfy the one night out, she started a principal program at a nearby university. She was well into the principal program when her superintendent asked her to do her internship as the stand-in principal. The internship was a train-on-the-job experience. "When the superintendent is asking

you to do a job— how do you say no? Barb did five years in the classroom, five years as a reading specialist and five as a principal.

The half-year position was the start of Barb's duties as a principal. From that half-year position and ten years teaching experience, Barb has entered her sixth year as the principal in one of the buildings where she was once a teacher.

Barb appears to be a dedicated educator in the midst of chaos. At the time of the interview, she was in the midst of moving from a school building built in 1937. The halls were stacked with a sundry of cardboard boxes with quite a variety of labels. Desks were piled high allowing only a small pathway to the current office. Barb's office was in no better condition. File cabinets were old with the drawers half open; boxes held PSSA scores and other assessments and plastic tubs were relegated to hold the contents of her desk and personal items.

Yet this principal was very energetic, happy and willing to discuss her school, staff and students. Barb's laughter at the situation of the "old" school reflected her enthusiasm for the move to an ultra modern elementary building with state-of-the-art- technology. A place that she says is "conducive to both teaching and learning".

### **Understanding the Whole System**

Understanding the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act is a necessary part of the whole system along with the notion of the Pennsylvania School System Assessment (PSSA). Barb understands the staff and how the school must operate for success. She knows the needs of the students and why student achievement on the PSSA is so important to the school and community.



Sitting back in her wobbly chair in a disheveled office, Barb talked affectionately about the staff. She knows them well. There was a new grandchild born to one teacher, there was another teacher planning a wedding and yet another teacher battling cancer. Barb talked about the needs of those teachers and how there was an added pressure for their students to perform well on the PSSA test. "I think my teachers probably put more pressure on themselves than what they need to. Barb says she spends a lot of time telling the staff to relax and concentrate on teaching the students. She explains there is so much news about PSSA, sending letters home to parents, worrying about the testing and the scores that there is a feeling of anxiety for the staff.

There was no doubt that Barb was proud of the school and students. With an ease of assurance, Barb talked about her role as the principal, being the building leader and implementing NCLB. To her, using data to drive decisions made her job easier. Change in instruction, schedules, assessment, classrooms and staffing was done by using data as a rationale. "We don't have a choice about NCLB; it's part of the law. Faculty meetings were used to communicate changes in the law and the mandates that were expected of the teachers and the school.

Curriculum is a very important factor in understanding the school system and the bar has been raised dramatically for schools to succeed. "School leaders place their institutions on the frontier of change," Senge, 2000, p. 10). With pressure to leave no child behind and make AYP with increasing performance targets, Barb's lips became terse and she used her hands to make explicit

statements about what was and what needs to be done. She shared the teachers' perception that all the fun had been taken out of teaching and the community wants an explanation for every educational activity done in the school. "We get more questions from the community. For example, if you show a movie they ask, why are you showing that movie?" The pressure is on the staff.

According to Barb, the teachers used to do a lot more art projects and music projects. "We were very heavy on teacher autonomy." She explains the staff spent time to define the curriculum and align it with the state standards. Because of the pressure to make AYP, the teachers took it upon themselves to cut out all the extras to concentrate on eligible content and the rising performance targets.

With the emphasis on reading and the subgroup of economically disadvantaged students continuing to make AYP, Barb discussed what was happening in that area. She wanted a research-based reading program in her school and looked to Reading Recovery© as a means to assist struggling readers in the primary grades; with the hopes they would be readers by the third grade PSSA test. The reading specialist took those program reading strategies and mentored classroom teachers to help all students. "At the end of second grade, we usually have a handful of kids that are not proficient."

Barb explains the teams are using guided reading as way to address instructional levels of at-risk readers. Barb adds:

We have worked real hard to make sure that there is a phonemic awareness component, there's a shared reading component, independent reading component, and the guided reading component, so we have a comprehensive literacy program.

## **Shared Vision**

The vision of success for the school as an organization must be a time when people talk about their hopes and dreams for the students and the community as a whole. The vision needs to be cohesive and generate momentum. This shared vision should then give rise to a personal vision for all parties to come together on a mutual process. Barb explains that she has learned there is a need to have an educational reason to support everything and that, sometimes, it is something that the teachers get frustrated with. "I try to make my style as a leader as unthreatening as I can." This principal gets frazzled by NCLB and the rising performance targets. She offered information about accomplishing goals with her staff. "I've worked for principals who are just iron-fisted and I have tried not to be like that." Offering choices, encouragement and taking small steps toward change is a path that is taken by this principal. The goals for the school and the students are of utmost importance and are frequently conveyed to the staff. While there were issues with the vision, through communication and support, the teachers slowly became oriented to the goal at hand. Barb talked about super-star teachers in her building who were respected and could help others with concerns about the change in the reading program. Then she spoke of those negative staff members who say, "I don't care what you do. I know what I am doing." These are the few resisters encountered by the principal.

By sitting in on grade-level meetings, Barb shared her vision for the future progress of the students and encouraged teachers to accomplish their goals.

She wanted the staff to have a sense of buy-in and feel a sense of ownership in the program. “With the freedom to enhance the content, mandated by the state, the staff has buy-in and shares the need to make AYP every year. “

However, Barb was not amiss by telling about some teachers who had been in classroom for many years and were used to “what they always do.” A few teachers were ready to retire and could not embrace NCLB and the mandates associated with the law. However, the principal stated,

I let my knowledgeable teachers share the positives at our meetings and the wonderful happenings in many of the classrooms. When the staff sees these two teachers excited about changes that are occurring, it makes my job easier. More teachers come on board with the mandates when it comes from fellow staff members.

### **Personal Mastery**

Senge (2000) describes personal mastery as...”a set of practices that support people, children and adults, in keeping their dreams whole while cultivating an awareness of the current reality around them” (p.59).

For Barb the goal or dream of continued success while implementing the mandates of NCLB meant the staff needed to master curricular changes, teaching styles and strategies for reading.

With Barb’s leadership, data seem to have made changes in the reading curriculum. Using the 4Sight assessment, Diagnostic Indicator of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS), fluency assessment and running records, data suggested a need for more reading instruction for continued AYP success. As Barb shared the results of the multiple data sources, the teacher’s level of concern was raised. They began to feel a sense of obligation to the students

when the scores were not as high as they had perceived. The reality of the scores indicated a need for change. “The data analysis has turned out to be a good thing.” The teachers wanted to master the new reading program to better serve their students. The resisters blamed the scores on the students, saying “they just don’t try hard enough.”

Many of the staff members learned guided reading procedures and classroom management to create success. They attended workshops and visited other schools to learn the best ways to implement the reading program and leveled books.

Resistant teachers, not wanting to be labeled by their peers as ineffective, began to investigate guided reading as a strategy to increase reading comprehension, vocabulary, and fluency. “A silent competition, of sorts, was waged among staff...you might call it a hidden agenda.” The teachers did not want their peers to see that students in their classrooms received lower reading scores than the other students. “This was the beginning of all the teachers mastering guided reading and some of the other reading strategies we introduced.”

### **Mental Models**

With some hesitation, Barb began sharing thoughts about some of the staff and how one teacher could see assessment and PSSA one way while another teacher had a totally different vision. Differences between mental models can explain why two people can observe the same event and describe it

differently, (Senge, 2000). While thinking cannot be seen visually, a conversation about an issue can bring these thoughts forward.

As Barb began describing differences in thinking about the accountability factor with PSSA, she shrugs her shoulders and throws up her hands “Most teachers agree that accountability is a good thing and getting all on board is taking a great deal of conversation.” She points to the binder of local assessments on the shelf and talked about having the assessments for twelve years with yearly revision if necessary.

“I said before, the data are useful, but teachers just see the assessment differently.” While some staff members could clearly see the vision for increased reading proficiency for all students, others took time and much support to view the goal. “They meet, they talk about reading and assessments, and we ask them what they think is important, what data are you going to use, that kind of thing. This is where the differences come into play.”

Barb explains that some teachers use the assessment to change what they do in the classroom. However, other teachers see assessment as only a student weakness. “To me they are the same thing and it takes a lot of conversation to bring about a change in thinking.”

### **Team Learning**

With out taking a breath, Barb’s energetic personality came out and with pride in her voice she was excited to share how the teachers had moved forward and began a team process to benefit all students. It was not just change for the at-risk students, but those students who needed enrichment as well. She became

a support system for the staff and a cheerleader for their accomplishments. She overlooked failure and applauded change. At the faculty meetings a lot of information was communicated about curriculum, instruction and learning. “We communicate a lot of information that affects more curricular kinds of things. But, we also have a learning team meeting every month that focuses more on the data and where we need to go with that.”

The learning teams have representatives from every grade level in the building, plus the department heads for the building are on the learning team as well. Strong teacher-leaders are considered for the department head positions. “They are just regular classroom teachers, but are experts in the content.” Barb finds these teachers to be good at being cheerleaders for the staff and very respected. These leaders are good at squelching negative comments and focusing on teaming for change. “Nobody contradicts them because they’re leaders! It actually works out really well.” The learning teams are productive, yet there are problems for the staff and the reading program.

### **Potholes**

When asked about problems with implementing NCLB, Barb gave a slight giggle indicating there are definitely potholes or bumps to overcome. She sighed and took a deep breath before beginning. “This law has given me a hassle since I took this job five years ago. There is always something new, some mandate from PDE (Pennsylvania Department of Education), but they never give us any more money.” Like the two other principals in the study, Barb talked about the mandate of hiring an English as a second language (ESL) teacher and the

expense to the budget that she needed to manage. “This district is in the heart of farm country, Central Pennsylvania...not Philadelphia. We don’t get ESL students. That costs us money!” It seems that the budget is a problem for all the change that is mandated by NCLB. Making AYP is paramount for this principal who operates on limited funding. “Change does cost money when resources are needed.”

Professional development was another problem for Barb. Her teachers needed training in guided reading, leveled books, and miscue analysis. To send teachers to conferences for guided reading and running record training was a hardship for balancing the school budget. She related that first the teachers were out of the classroom for training and then she had to hire substitute teachers who were not trained to fill in for the regular staff. Time is a hassle. “There is never enough time to do what we need to do. Time to meet, time for learning teams, time for training, time to write curriculum....it just never stops! I don’t have the funds to pay the teachers for after-school curriculum work.” Getting parents to understand the importance of the PSSA test was yet another issue for Barb.

They complain because there are less fun things for their children to do. They say the teachers give too much homework. And, at conferences, the teachers tell me that the parents are tired of hearing about PSSA. But, if this school was labeled as “In need of Improvement” by PDE, the parents would complain about inferior teaching. So, you see, this law is trouble for me.



## **Teacher Responses Shaping the Portrait of Barb**

The teacher participants in Barb's building were very experienced teachers. The range of their teaching experience went from eight to seventeen years. All three teachers had taught in the elementary building for eight or more years. Each teacher was a willing participant and eager to discuss his or her school, the PSSA test, NCLB, and their students. Their stories help shape the portrait of Barb as the building administrator and educational leader. These teachers discussed organizational change in the school building, changes to the reading program, PSSA, NCLB and addressed the leadership style of the principal.

### **Understanding the Whole System**

The teachers in the building were putting a focus on reading and reading achievement for all students. Making AYP was necessary to keep the school out of 'School Improvement' and to insure student success. The teachers openly discussed some of the changes to keep the students moving toward proficiency. One teacher raised her eyebrows thinking before she offered one approach. "We try to keep a lot of consistency for third, fourth, and fifth grades." She talked about grouping and the low ability readers and how these students need more time to learn than some of the other students. The reading program changed from a basal series to layered approach using the five components of reading: phonics, decoding, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension. In other words, she described a balanced approach to teaching reading. "The students are getting

the same instruction, just in a different way. These skills are broken down and taught according to need.”

The fifth grade teacher was very emphatic and enthusiastic about the changes in reading. “We have done so much for the students.” PSSA and the Pennsylvania academic standards are the concentration for fifth and sixth grade. When some at-risk learners become frustrated with practice, this teacher acts like a cheerleader to lend support and boost confidence. All the teachers in the study understand the focus on student proficiency in reading and the school making AYP. “Barb tells us about the mandates of NCLB and that we must follow the law. And then there is the accountability issue for us.”

The teachers are very aware of accountability and what the future might bring for them regarding evaluation. The mandates are there in front of them and Sandy went on to say, “I have to live with the mandates. I have changed the reading lessons to accommodate the low students. It is the law, so I must do what it says to do.”

### **Shared Vision**

Barb eagerly shared the vision for the school and all the students with the teachers on a regular basis. The goal was to make continuous AYP and develop students as life-long learners.

When asked how Barb shared the vision, the fifth grade teacher responded.

We usually have team meetings. The department head reviews the changes with us and we all meet to discuss how we can help the kids. We do all this together to meet the building goals.

The teacher went on to add information about Barb and how she perceives her

leadership toward improving student achievement. This teacher validated that Barb is not demanding and treats the staff like professionals. Her leadership style is to communicate the needs of the students and allow the staff the autonomy to create a learning environment them. “I don’t feel like she’s hovering. I think she’s very helpful in sharing the goals for the school. Most of the teachers know the demands on this test are extreme and pulled together to share the vision of continuous AYP.

With a tilt of her head and raising a finger in the air as though a thought came to her. The teacher happily added:

Barb is very researched-based. So a lot of her information is definitely based on research. We all know she reads and keeps up with the latest in education. We trust her to share solid information to make our students the best and help us meet the challenges of NCLB.

Sharing the vision for student success and proficiency in reading has not come easily for some staff members. Reluctantly, some teachers slowly make changes in curriculum and technology use. One resister wanted to teach reading “the old way” and was not a fan of computers and guided reading. Shaking her head in a negative manner with one corner of her lip upturned, Amy talked about one teacher who would not use computers or reading software with the students. The teammate did not want to leave the comfort zone of the basal reader. To share the vision and reach organizational goals, Barb knew it was essential to get the right people on the bus (Collins, 2001).

### **Personal Mastery**

To complete the goal of the school for each student to be successful on the Pennsylvania Academic Standards and continue AYP while implementing the

mandates of NCLB, the staff looked to innovative teaching strategies and curricular changes. Professional development was done on a systematic matrix to increase knowledge of guided reading, word work, spelling and best practices in teaching methodology. The fourth grade teacher explains, "I went to some inservices on guided reading and vocabulary enhancement. But, I also learned ways to increase spelling accuracy; which then increases reading ability."

Mastering the strategies for the new reading program was important to her so her students could be successful. The reading specialists in the building coached classroom teachers in using leveled books, administering miscue analyses, and running records.

The fifth grade teacher talked about data analysis and how the data pointed to a weakness in the reading program. "Barb shares the data with the teams and then we take a look at the students who are not progressing." The need for a change in reading motivated this teacher to mastering the areas of a comprehensive reading program.

Once again, the principal's leadership style was mentioned. "Barb trusts us to do our job." Trust was a motivator for learning best practices in reading following through with guided reading.

### **Mental Models**

Differences in mental models explain why teachers view accountability with NCLB differently. PSSA is foremost in the minds of teachers and making AYP can be a personal enigma. Sue expressed that the

accountability attached to PSSA is overwhelming and stressful. The reading program helps students gain success, yet she sees herself as personally responsible for those students with low ability reading levels. “It’s the pressure every year because they want the kids to go a step further. It’s never good enough.” Sue’s grade-level colleagues in the school feel fun educational projects are put on hold to practice for the PSSA test.

However, another teacher had a different view of PSSA and accountability. Her mental model of the program fell more in line with NCLB. “I do value accountability and think that it’s necessary to get ALL teachers accountable. I do think that the standards should be raised higher for teachers and students, but in a way that works for all children of all different needs.”

By reviewing data and making comparisons of programs has made this staff member look at teaching in a different way. For her, accountability creates a teaming environment where adjusting teaching and learning gives every student a chance for success. “In this building particularly, we work as a team.”

### **Team Learning**

The teachers in this particular school were eager to share how teaming worked in the building. They talked about meetings, standards, colleagues, PSSA and making AYP. The mandates of NCLB were conveyed through a variety of ways. “Barb always gives updates.” Team meeting occurred on a regular basis to look at multiple forms of data and to get updates from the Pennsylvania Department of Education.

Faculty meetings, grade-level meetings, emails and memos were used by Barb and the staff to keep the teams informed and working for the common goal. And, periodically, she will have meetings that bring us up to speed on new things that have changed and what to look for. “Barb’s been very good to have faculty meetings that reinforce the standards, different ways to approach them, and collaborative working in those faculty meetings.” The teachers shared information about mentoring teams and how these teachers modeled strategies to aid those teachers with less experience. “Mentoring has been very important in our school.”

As the educational leader in the building, the principal made the staff aware of the mandates connected to NCLB. Another teacher added more information about teaming and how Barb supported the staff. “A lot of times her goals are standards-based and she is very good at getting a lot of literature books that will help make us be better teachers. She puts a few teachers in charge and then the team leaders work with us. “There was a strong feeling that the team has impacted student achievement.

### **Emergent Themes**

Emergent themes are revealed as shapes that are joined together with a voice in selecting a pattern to which they fit and are joined together. The development of emergent themes reflects the portraitist’s first efforts to bring interpretive insight and order to the collection of data. It is the job of the portraitist to draw out dialogue and patterns that structures a framework for the narrative. As the principals tell their stories and share insights about implementing the No

Child Left Behind Act, the portraitist weaves the tapestry with threads and themes to create the finished product.

In this chapter, themes are presented as they were uncovered in the in stories of the principals. Connections are presented along with some disconnections noted by some of the participants. Looking at the overarching question for the study, What accounts for the success of meeting Adequate Yearly Progress on the Pennsylvania School System Assessment? several themes emerged. The threads of the tapestry or emerging themes are: Living with policy, Resisters, Letting Go, Teachers as Experts, and Teaming.

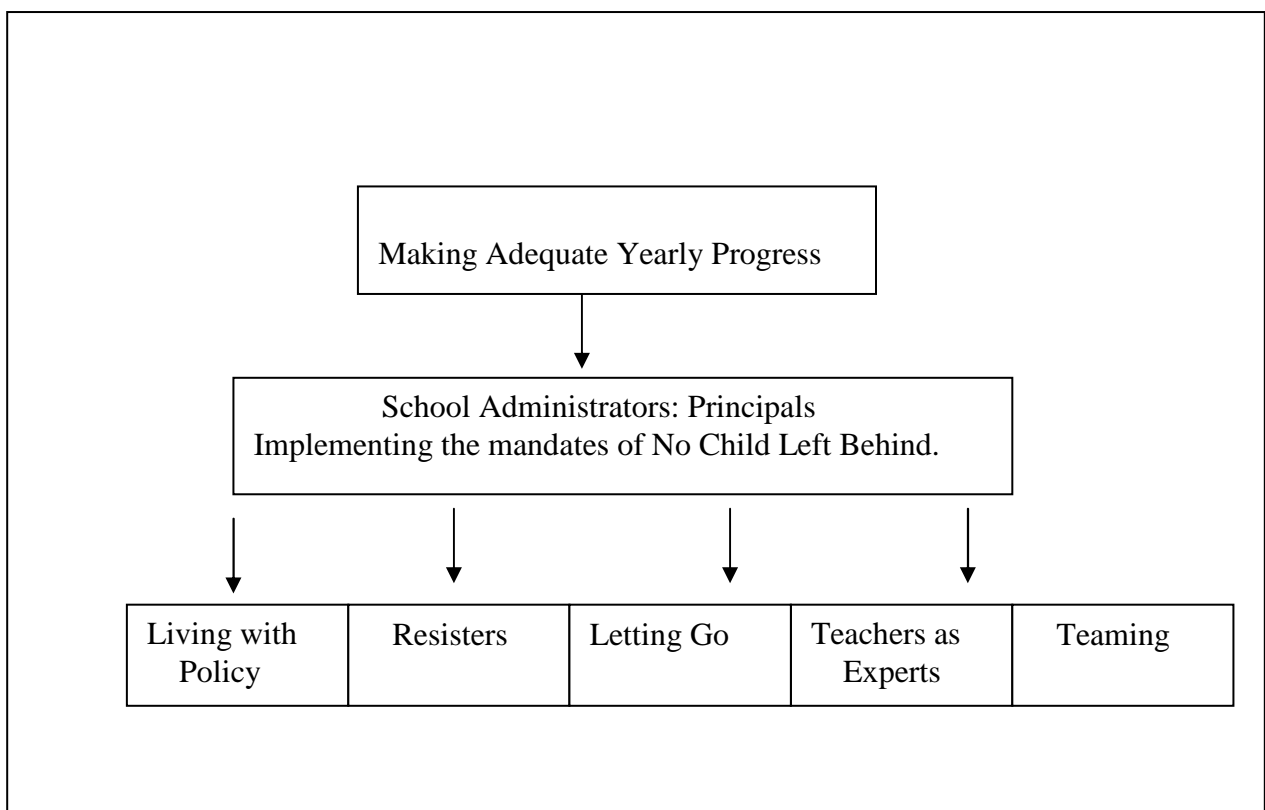


Figure 1. Emergent themes.

## Living with Policy

As the school administrators sought to carry out the vision for improved student achievement in reading and Making Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) on the Pennsylvania School System Assessment (PSSA), they each confronted the law as they implemented the mandates connected to the law. Barb stated, "What can I do about NCLB? I have to live with it." Scott told his teachers. "NCLB is a mandate - the law and we are under the gun."

NCLB has caused budgetary constraints for all three administrators due to mandates like hiring an ESL teacher, buying resources for additional programs and hiring extra staff to insure AYP. "You know, you have to get pretty creative with the budget to fund some things," reported Barb. "And you also have to let some things go. It seems that the budget is a problem in light of all the change we needed to make to in order to achieve AYP. Change does cost money when resources are needed."

To live with NCLB, two of the administrators had to give up teacher travel and workshops for professional development. They opted to bring in a trainer for a day or send one person to a workshop who then came back to the school and utilized the train-the-trainer concept.

Trish stated, "Time, money, teachers, tests, attendance, and special education, NCLB has all the mandates. I have to keep my building making AYP or I will be letting the community down." She further explained, "But, the budget, the money...that's a real big issue. The state does not give us money. They say 'here is the law' now follow it. Not only do I need funds for professional



development, I had to hire an ESL (English as a second language teacher). I do not have any ESL students in my building.” Not every administrator articulated these remarks, but the others felt compelled to perform.

Because the policy is punitive in nature concerning performance on the state PSSA test, the administrators conformed to the law because the community would see the school as underperforming and in need of improvement. Living with the law was a necessary function for all three administrators in areas of curriculum, instruction, staff development, budget, and programs.

### **Resisters**

As educational leaders, the school administrators shared the vision and goals for student achievement and making AYP, but not all staff members had the same viewpoint. Each administrator encountered a form of resistance among some teachers. There was one teacher who could not face the transition from the basal series to the balanced literacy program. “I am not doing it.” Facing the transition marks the ending of one process and the beginning of another. However, resistance can be a normal reaction to change and reform. Evans (1996) hypothesizes readiness for a new program maybe the reason for resistance. “How am I going to do guided reading when I haven’t had training?” Disequilibrium and resistance for this teacher was caused by a lack of knowledge and confidence to execute guided reading correctly.

Some educators are reluctant or unwilling to change and seen as oppositional. “I have been teaching reading for twenty-five years and it has worked just fine.” While a resister may appear to have a character flaw, it is

often the fear of change that causes the reaction (Evans, 1996). A veteran teacher in Barb's building shared this thought. "Over the years, curriculum changes. It comes and goes and so will guided reading."

While Scott identified the resistance from his teachers, Trish had a difficult time understanding what several teachers were resisting. "I don't know what they are resisting or say when I'm not around. But, getting the right people to lead will bring the others around." Schlechety (2001) argues transition is complex and must be managed to complete the vision for the organization. Transformation of resistance brings about fundamental reform for the school organization.

### **Letting Go**

Each administrator concentrated on reading improvement as a goal for student success. Each had a vision to implement a research-based literacy program that would serve all students in the building. All students included: special education, ESL, economically disadvantaged, and all ethnic groups.

Letting go was a personal change in a leadership style for all three administrators. Each wanted different types of control over the reading program, but realized letting the teachers have autonomy was a better way to go.

Data analysis was a key effort for each administrator. Getting the teachers involved with root cause analysis proved to be a stepping stone, along with introduction to best practices in reading, specifically, guided reading. When teachers were trained, rather than being micro-manger, one administrator said, "I give them freedom to fly."

Letting go was more difficult for two of the principals in the study because they were hands-on administrators. “I need to be in that room observing and knowing what is happening,” stated one principal. The principal said she collected every lesson plan and wanted evidence of grouping and guided reading.

However, after a few weeks into the new literacy program both of these administrators left go of control and allowed the teachers the space to get comfortable with all the new changes in the reading program. “Trish remarked, “I’m a generalist, not a reading teacher. I had to let go of the fourth and fifth grade team and trust their decisions about data and instruction for the at-risk students.”

Barb, who was a reading specialist before becoming a principal, had the most difficult time letting go of the teachers and the data. She understands the how children make meaning of text to become grade-level readers. For her, allowing the freedom for her teachers to engage in guided reading was difficult. “They are just classroom teachers,” she told me. While she, herself, was highly trained in reading, the classroom teachers needed time to learn how to manage a guided reading class and reading centers. After setting up “studio teachers” Barb began letting go. The “studio teachers” are those individuals who have mastered the literacy program and help other teachers set up their classrooms, offer to train teachers, and are willing to model instruction in the classroom. The studio teacher concept was the key for letting go.

## **Teachers as Experts**

The emergent theme, “Letting go” proved to be a springboard for the theme “Teachers as experts.” Each administrator in the study referred to teacher experts in the schools and the value they placed on them. Scott offered, “I know what a good song sounds like, but I can’t write the melody. He used this metaphor to refer to how the literacy program should look. Scott further explained, “I find experts in my building who have the knowledge and background to work with a group of peers to conduct an initiative or goal in my school.” He felt buy-in for the literacy program went well because the staff had respect for the expert teachers who were leading the reading program.

Trish acknowledged, “I am not an instructional expert here [in the school]. I do have some experts and utilize them.” This principal used the experts to head up meetings, to be liaisons between her and the grade levels and used these experts to be team leaders.

## **Teaming**

Teaming was a resounding theme in this study and surfaced many times. Every administrator spoke of teaming in his or her school and how students were better served through the grade-level teams. The administrators used a collaborative leadership style to further the vision for their schools. “I started team meetings to make changes.” Trish conveyed, “I have teams at each grade level with an expert teacher as the leader. The teams consist of the classroom teachers, the psychologist, the special education teacher and the Title I teacher.” In each school in the study, teams were utilized to analyze data, discuss at-risk

students, align curriculum, and initiate the literacy program. In the daily or weekly schedule, a common planning time was created to give more latitude to the teams.

One administrator meets with each team every three to four weeks to gather information about the progress of the at-risk students. He expects to see data that support the instruction and assessment of these students.

In another school, teaming is organized differently. This administrator creates teams by having one teacher at each grade level represent the grade rather than having all the teachers on a team. This team representative shares issues and concerns with the team and then reports back to the grade level.

However the teams are organized, they each have the same goal in mind. First, the team is organized to provide teacher experts to insure the reading program is carried out with fidelity. Second, it is the team's responsibility to analyze data, which in turn drives curriculum and instruction. Third, the team monitors all students for continual progress.

The emergent themes give insight into the implementation of NCLB and how the administrators and the teachers implement the law.

### **Chapter Summary**

In chapter Four, the portraits of the three elementary school administrators were presented along with the themes that emerged from their stories. The portraits were woven from the narrative within the contextual background of each administrator. The context was used to place the participants in a time and place as a resource for understanding what they do as school leaders. "These portraits

are shaped through dialogue between the portraitist and the subject, each one participating in the drawing of the image,” Lawrence-Lightfoot (1997).

## CHAPTER FIVE

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS

On January 8, 2002, President George W. Bush signed into law the No Child Left Behind Act. of 2001(NCLB). The intent and purpose of this law is to close the achievement gap with accountability, flexibility, and choice so that no child is left behind (NCLB 2002). On the surface, the implementation of NCLB has been enacted for the betterment of all students. However, it is the unfunded initiatives that appear to be a struggle for rural school administrators. Rural schools in particular have a lower tax base, fewer resources, are isolated, and have higher teacher attrition. Administrators share concerns about high-stakes testing, performance targets, the timeline for proficiency and unfunded mandates.

NCLB creates a daily dialogue in schools throughout Pennsylvania, especially rural Pennsylvania. Since 2014 is the deadline for one hundred percent proficiency for all students and making Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), school leaders are constantly re-evaluating the school as a learning community; along with curriculum and instruction. The punitive consequences for schools are great and have a wide range of sanctions. From Stage One, warning, to Corrective Action II, a state takeover of the school, administrators are using rich forms of data to drive decision-making.

In Chapter Five, the research questions are addressed by summarizing the emergent themes that were revealed in the administrator portraits presented in Chapter Four. Chapter Five also aligns the research findings to the theoretical

framework of this study: organizational change, change process, individual change and transitions to change.

The organizational change theories of Hall & Hord (2006); Kotter (2002) and Senge (2000, 1999) serve as the theoretical filter for summarizing the emergent themes concerning changes to the school organization. Individual change theory is seen through a lens using the work of Evans (1996) and Kotter (2002). The work of Evans (1996) and Bridges (2003) serve as reference for transitions and staff resistance found as an emergent theme.

The first section of Chapter Five provides a summary of the data analysis of the perceptions of the school administrators as they implement the mandates of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). Each research question is addressed using the portraits of the school administrators with validation provided by the teacher participants. The second section provides conclusions based on the data analyzed in chapter four. Finally, recommendations for future research are presented.

Making Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) on the Pennsylvania School System Assessment (PSSA) and continuous school improvement is at the forefront for rural school administrators. Having a school labeled as “in need of improvement” is a negative connotation for the students, teachers and the community because educational leaders, school administrators are held responsible for making AYP by having students reach proficiency on the PSSA performance targets.



With an emphasis on making continuous AYP, the rural school administrators who were involved in this study had a vision for creating change where all students progress in reading. By taking carefully orchestrated steps, research supports that a change can take place within an organization (Bridges, 2003; Kotter, 2002; Schlechty, 2001; Senge, 2000). In this case study, the organization in the school is illuminated as change occurred.

### **Summary of Research**

#### ***Overarching Research Question: What Accounts for the Success of Meeting Adequate Yearly Progress on the Pennsylvania School System Assessment?***

Since rural school districts are known to have a lower tax-base, fewer resources, teacher attrition, isolation and a large geographic area (Rural Pennsylvania, 2007) this question explores how rural school administrators continue to make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) on the Pennsylvania School System Assessment test. It also explores the process of change to the school organization. In addition, this question uncovers individual changes experienced by the principals as the educational leaders in the school. Rethinking leadership, the school organization and the delivery of education (Reeves, 2003) have challenged the school administrators as they implement the mandates of NCLB.

The responses of the school administrators and teachers brought to light how the schools, in which the research was conducted, made continuous progress toward the shared vision of reading proficiency for all students. As visionary leaders, the principals laid out a plan to incorporate a comprehensive

reading program in their elementary buildings. These principals assisted the staff to create a mental model (Senge, 2000) of the comprehensive reading program and a shared vision for student success (Senge, 2000). Levels of concern and sense of urgency (Hall & Hord, 2006; Kotter, 2002) were accomplished by the principals sharing the mandates of NCLB and the punitive consequences of not making AYP. Grade-level teams were established to serve as collaborative groups who shared best practices and mentored the guided reading process for those teachers with less experience and knowledge. Through guided reading, the multiple intelligences (Gardner 1999) of students could be tapped as learning styles differed and were addressed on an individual basis. In addition, Smoker (2006) argues that students benefit from being good readers in all content areas.

Professional development for the comprehensive reading program in each school of the three schools differed. One administrator sent only a few teachers to a workshop or conference and they in turn used the train-the-trainer model with the remaining staff to approach best practices and guided reading. One principal brought in a literacy coach from a neighboring school district to mentor the staff for learning guided reading and yet, another principal used teacher-experts for professional development.

Continuous AYP was also supported by organizational change of the physical building, staffing, job descriptions, schedules, reading programs, and differentiated instruction.

## Research Question Number One

What obstacles Do School Administrators Face as They Implement the No Child Left Behind Act?

As the 2014 timeline draws closer for one hundred percent student proficiency, school leaders seek ways to overcome the obstacles found in the largest sweeping Federal policy known to education. With the possibility of cuts in Federal entitlement grants for failing to make AYP, administrators face the obstacles head-on. Budget and funding was a theme that echoed throughout this study as a pothole for each school administrator.

In this age of recession, ten percent unemployment, housing costs falling and increases in foreclosures, schools face the problem of a lower tax-base and less funding for educating rural students. One teacher lamented, "My principal does not have money in the budget to buy some of things I need for my classroom." NCLB requires standardized testing for accountability, which adds increased costs for schools. One administrator shared, "I am paying over five thousand dollars for testing that I never had to do before. My budget is stretched." The centralized control of NCLB promotes a bureaucratic authority to make schools more efficient. Weber's purposive-rationale weighs the costs and consequences of our actions and implementation of decisions based on formal criteria of efficiency and cost-benefit analysis (Heydebrand, 1994). In other words, purposive-rationale searches for the most efficient economical and technical means to achieve goals.

Achieving one hundred percent proficiency by 2014 is a mandate of NCLB placing budgetary pressure on schools. For rural schools with sixteen percent of the population over the age of sixty-five, funding is a challenge for compliance issues. Each respondent in the study used the word 'creative' when discussing the school budget. In order to fund a remedial classroom, one administrator put textbook adoption on a rotating scale by content area to use the school funds more efficiently. Not only is funding a problem for assessment costs, but school administrators site high-stakes testing, itself, as a barrier to overcome.

The responses of the school administrators and the teachers about the obstacles of NCLB were similar. No matter what grade-level was taught, each teacher had the same thoughts about high-stakes testing.

While bringing data together for continuous school improvement is important for decision-making in learning communities, (Bernhardt, 2009), Nichols, S. & Berliner, D. (2007), argue NCLB is the reason for the pervasive spread of high-stakes testing. "I test my students five times a year with 4Sight Assessment and then the PSSA (Pennsylvania School System Assessment) in the spring. They are tired of tests. They don't even want to try to answer the questions." "High-stakes testing environments sap the strength and vitality out of most, though not all teachers and administrators" (Nichols, S. & Berliner, D. 2007, p. 168). "Parents ask me why I am always talking about the PSSA test."

Administrators in this study note a drop in morale among teachers and students as the PSSA approaches in the spring. Projects are put on hold to

review concepts that could be tested. While some administrators hold ice cream parties, pizza parties and hand out “no homework” cards for student motivation, Nichols, D. & Berliner, D. (2007) suggest, this type of motivation does little in high-stakes testing. The threat of high-stakes testing exerts pressure on both students and teachers. All administrators and teachers spoke to the issue that the PSSA is not fair to learning support students. These students function and learn below grade-level, yet they are tested at their age grade-level.

Due to many changes happening within the school, administrators found teacher-leaders to carry out some of the needed initiatives. However, each administrator had a few teachers who did not value the PSSA test, the new reading program or differentiated instruction. These staff members resisted the changes in the school and the programs.

The resisters among the staff were yet another barrier to implementing the mandates of NCLB. “I am not doing it.” “I have no training in special education and I have too much to do already.” “I can’t add another thing to my day.” Some the teachers closed their doors, refused to do guided reading, stuck to the old basal series and rarely met with their grade-level colleagues.

Adult development theory (Lemme, 2002) suggests life stages such age, retirement, family, young children and aging parents are among a few reasons adults resist change. In addition, the fear of the unknown and the transition from old to new (Bridges, 2003) can be a source of resistance. Change is situational, but transition is psychological; a phase that people go through as they internalize and come to terms with the details that the change brings about (Bridges, 2003).

Administrators guiding and supporting the teachers through the balanced literacy process in the classrooms was an important part of the vision for student progress in reading. Easing the stress of transition and creating mental models for articulation and dialogue allowed staff to voice concerns and work together to reach the goal. The teachers had a voice in the change process. “We meet with the principal and talk about testing and what is new with the law. She let’s us brainstorm some ways we can do things differently.” One administrator did a pilot reading program in one classroom and gradually added others. Each time a classroom was added someone had volunteered to do it. For her the gradual transition helped bring along some of the resisters after a period of time.

Responses from the school administrators indicated other obstacles encountered were time, schedules, curriculum alignment, professional development and staffing. Teacher responses also validated these obstacles. A fourth grade teacher crisply stated, “There is no time in my day to see another group of students for reading. What can I take away to do it?”

Each one of these obstacles pointed back to funding and budgetary issues. The need for added materials and teacher workshops directly affected the budget. The mandates came with NCLB, but no funding was added to carry out the mandates. In some cases, the administrators cut programs, diminished materials and resources and halted contiguous professional development. In other words, they were asked to do more with fewer funds. “I have a building to maintain and run and yet I must use more and more money for this law [NCLB].” The same was true of time as a pothole. “Where do we get more time to add the

Response to Intervention (RtI) class?” “I need more time with my struggling readers.” “If I add this class, I will not get through all the curriculum.” Each administrator used the word “creative” when talking about schedules, bus departures, organizing curriculum blocks, lunch and recess. Complying with the mandates is a “shell game” said one of the principals.

### **Research Question Number Two**

How Do School Administrators Implement the Specific Components of NCLB?

“The reaction to the NCLB initiative expressed by policy elite, legislators, most political pundits and editorial writers leaves little doubt that the transformation of America’s schools from community institutions to government agencies is seen by many as a positive move”, (Schlechty, 2009, p. 156). NCLB is law and school administrators must comply with all facets of the law. Since there are ten titles to NCLB with explicit guidelines, the specific components are listed for compliance. These ten titles can be found in Chapter 1.

The administrators in this case study had a clear vision for a balanced literacy program and reading proficiency for all students. They felt the pressure of making AYP and keeping the school out of school improvement. Updating the staff of changes and mandates of NCLB was a priority for the administrators. “Our principal always lets us know what’s going on. She really stays on top of things.” Teachers spoke about feeling needed and respected when included in updates and possible changes to be made. Reading proficiency was the goal for all students and all respondents felt NCLB had impacted their teaching. Teachers commented on how NCLB was getting them to think as a collective

group toward the vision for the school. The increase of collegiality in a collaborative environment and communicating as a group met the criteria of indicators for a learning community (Fullan, 2005; Senge et al. (1999). While working within grade-level groups, teachers faced accountability for both their students and themselves. The pressure of making AYP and holding the staff accountable is one component of NCLB the administrators faced.

One administrator offered, "While we were beginning the balanced literacy program, I would pop into classrooms to see if the kids were engaged. No pressure on staff: just a way for me to assess lessons." Other than a formal teacher observation, two administrators created checklists for teachers to make them accountable for the guided reading process. Each section of guided reading was to be administered with fidelity and assessment of students became a tool for further instruction. Tests are no longer just for grades because data that are collected from tests set the stage for program evaluation, curriculum revision and differentiated instruction.

To hold the teachers accountable for student proficiency, all three respondents used the components of NCLB as the rationale for analyzing data. Since it was the law directing the teachers for accountability and not the principal, the staff had less animosity toward the principal. "She is just doing her job. The law says we have to do it." Each participant in the study felt the PSSA test was only one snapshot into a student's knowledge-base and only a small fraction of teaching that occurs in the classroom. Reeves (2004) suggests, "Teaching is an art not a science to be reduced to superficial numbers."



To implement accountability for the school, teachers and students, each administrator began with analyzing a variety of data. Data were gathered from a variety of sources, but administrators needed time to instruct the staff on how to look at the data objectively. Collins (2002) describes this as “a blameless autopsy.”

Highly Qualified teachers was another component of NCLB to be addressed. Each administrator hired only highly qualified teachers or teachers that held a Pennsylvania Teacher Certification. Regular classroom teachers were not the problem. However, special education teachers and English as a second language teachers were a pothole for compliance. Pennsylvania Code 22 §4.26 in the Basic Education Circular controls ESL programs. The law states that every district must provide a quality ESL program with a Pennsylvania Certified ESL teacher, but this mandate is not funded. Districts are struggling with budget cuts and property tax referendums while being told that they must hire certified ESL teachers. Each administrator shared, as a rural district, they rarely enrolled an ESL student. Complying with this component was difficult due to lack of funds.

For each of the elementary schools in this study, the Parent Involvement component of NCLB was not an issue. Each rural school was situated in a small community where many activities revolved around the school. Due to the closeness of community members, teachers had no problem involving parents, grandparents and some mentors into the balanced literacy program. “We held some reading activities for the parents and gave each household a homework

box.” The box contained supplies the students would need to read, write and do content homework. One principal shared, “Some of the businesses in town donated pencils, calculators, erasers and story books for the kids. It was great.” Under NCLB, parents have the “Right to Know” about scores, teacher certifications and if the child is being taught by a teacher who is not highly qualified. They also have the ability to move their child out of a failing school.

Each administrator took slow deliberate steps to comply with the law, change the reading program, initiate a Response to Intervention program, create data teams and establish teacher-leaders. While each proceeded in a different manner, the end result was similar.

### **Research Question Number Three**

What is the most Dramatic Change to Administrative Practice Since the Implementation of NCLB?

The aim of this research question was to gain insight into the practice of the elementary school administrator, as the building leader, while being impacted by NCLB. Collectively, the administrators exhibited similar practices while implementing NCLB. However, each administrator approached the process of change in a different manner.

Several dramatic changes occurred for the respondents in this study. First, while their belief about student learning stayed constant, in that all students can learn if taught at their instructional level; their belief about learning communities took a turn toward transforming practices in the school. According to Crowther (2009), “Teacher leadership is inseparable from the concept of

empowerment, which is sometimes characterized as involvement in organizational decision-making” (p. 85). Empowerment is seen as critical to the creation of a learning organization. These school administrators learned to share power to address the reading goal set for the school. Principals must know when and how to step back from their own leadership and encourage teacher colleagues to step forward (Crowther, 2009). By stepping back, the school administrators allowed teachers to have a voice and dialogue with their peers to create a learning community for the balanced literacy program. One principal shared, “I am not an expert. I have to let my experts [teachers] in the building share guided reading strategies.” Teacher leaders surfaced in the grade-level groups to orchestrate the learning community and professional development for their colleagues.

The most dramatic change for each school administrator came in the form of individual change. Each principal adapted his or her leadership style in the process of focusing on the vision for system change. However, each principal evolved in different ways. With a shared vision in place and a mental model projected, systems thinking fell into place. Transformational leaders have the ability to shape, alter and elevate motivation, values and goals of the followers.

Response of the administrators indicated they had successfully adapted their leadership style. Yet, some of the staff members saw these changes in the principal as another way to control the school.

One principal in this study approached change with gusto that created some resistance for him. He is a “go getter.” Therefore, once the vision and goals were created for the balanced literacy program, he was set to increase reading skills, albeit too fast for the staff. “He is in my room every day. He gave us data logs that we are required to keep.” Enthusiasm in this particular case became a negative factor for change. However, the principal listened to the staff, gave them a voice in the process and began to offer support and encouragement. As his grade level teams emerged, a transformed leadership style took hold for him.

The principal in the second elementary school in the study was a leader that embodied change, but she was a top-down leader to start. “We are going to engage in a balanced literacy program in this school.” One teacher asked, “Where did this come from? No one told us.” With noticeable staff resistance, this principal had to change her style. She slowed down the process of change, invited groups of teachers to discuss reading, analyze data and revise teaching practices for better student proficiency in reading. According to Silverman (2006), if proper steps are taken and everything is not done at once, introducing balanced reading does not have to be overwhelming.

This school administrator became an adaptive leader by creating a sense of urgency, being a cheerleader for small steps accomplished in the classroom, and being very supportive of the staff. Motivation changed for the staff and this particular principal created an environment that allowed the staff to recognize the goals and go far beyond their accomplishments. “Come into my reading class

and see how well my kids are doing in guided reading,” offered the fourth grade teacher.

The third principal in the study was a leader that had a hard time letting go and not being involved in every change that took place. She was a hands-on leader who needed to know everything. Adapting her leadership style was a slow process for her, but she eventually took on the role. While she could not put a label on her changed leadership style, her responses to the interview questions were clear indicators. The principal set up committees, “studio teachers,” time in the schedule for dialogue, questioning, and grade-level peer groups. One teacher stated, “She is serious about the balanced literacy program and is so helpful.” When the third principal adapted her leadership style, a mental model was created, the vision was clear and goals were set for improved reading practices. The teachers became excited working with their colleagues and having schedule changes to work together. This school administrator transformed the staff for organizational change and personal mastery of guided reading.

#### **Research Question Number Four**

How Do Administrators Adapt to Increased Mandates for Accountability?

Each school administrator in the study saw adapting to the mandates for accountability as living with policy; a theme that emerged in Chapter Four. “It’s the law, what can we do?” Communication with the staff was paramount to accountability, mandates and change. The fifth grade teacher said, “She tells us

everything about NCLB. If we have to makes changes in reading she helps us figure it out.”

Each year the performance targets change in reading and math. Even though all three schools in the study made AYP in reading for the last two years, increasing accountability is cause for concern.

As AYP increases, the administrators in the study rely on teams of teachers to review curriculum, analyze data, align curriculum with the Pennsylvania Academic Standards and monitor struggling readers and special education students. Adaptations were made to reading in the form of a balanced literacy program, guided reading, Response to Intervention (RtI) for low ability students, and direct instruction for special education students who are behind their age-mates.

As the accountability for AYP increased, the school administrators in the study paid particular attention to the special education sub-group. This one sub-group could place a school in “need of improvement.” These students not only received the core reading curriculum, but also received direct reading instruction through the RtI process. Supporting teachers with staff development, schedule changes, planning time (according to teachers is not enough) and materials, the administrators made adaptations for increased accountability.

### Research Question Number Five

How is Organizational Change Affected by the Contextual Mandates of NCLB?

Kotter (2002) and Senge (2000) suggest a framework for organizational change with slightly overlapping steps to the process. The school administrators in the study engaged in change using a combination of the frameworks.

Analyzing the data in Chapter Four not only suggests emerging themes, but gives insight into how the school administrators used both the framework of Kotter (2002) and Senge (2000) to create change in their perspective buildings.

Table 8

#### *Juxtaposing Two Frameworks for Organizational Change*

Senge 2000 Five Steps	Kotter 2002 Eight Steps
1. Understanding the whole system	1. Increased urgency 2. Build a guiding team
2. Shared Vision	3. Get the vision right 4. Communicate for buy-in
3. Personal Mastery	5. Empower action
4. Mental models	6. Create short-term wins
5. Team learning	7. Don't let up 8. Make change stick

NCLB has changed the way in which school administrators view the school and the school system. The mandates of NCLB created organizational changes through the physical arrangement of the school, the school system in which the teachers instruct students, and the taught and tested curriculum.

One principal asserted, "I moved the classrooms and made grade level pods. Teachers need to be closer to each other." In one building, a storage room was changed into a meeting/planning room for data analysis. In another building kidney shaped tables were purchased for guided reading.

System changes were made by all three respondents in their perspective schools. Since reading proficiency was the goal; a master schedule was created in one building to allow for Rtl and more efficient times for art, physical education, and music. "I carved out twenty minutes at the end of the day for instruction of my struggling readers."

Through collaboration with grade-level teams, curricular alignment was made with the Pennsylvania Academic Standards and benchmarks for success were established. Teaching guided reading with fidelity was established through professional development, teacher-mentors, and peer observation. All nine teacher-participants responded positively toward their principal after observing the benefits of the organizational change in their schools.

While the mandates of NCLB have affected school administrators and teachers throughout rural Pennsylvania by causing potholes and barriers, the



school organization was changed to benefit the reading proficiency of all students with the intent of continued AYP.

### **Conclusion**

Researchers (Hall & Hord 2006; Kotter, 2002; Senge, 1999, 2000) have studied organization change for schools as learning communities. They found when systems thinking is put into place, change could be successful. By taking appropriate steps in the change process, the overarching goal or the vision for the school can be obtained with minimal anxiety, buy-in from staff, and a smooth transition.

The No Child Left Behind Act has caused tension for school administrators due to the stress of unfunded mandates, accountability and the way in which accountability is calculated. However, continued school improvement is vital to student achievement and should be looked upon as a positive practice.

This study concluded that by using organizational change and a systems thinking model, schools as learning organizations, can achieve Adequate Yearly Progress and goals that go beyond legislation.

Believing that all students can learn, including special education students, the elementary school administrators in this study kept the vision for a balanced literacy program alive while working with the staff to make a transition from old to new. Changing the organization to keep in compliance with NCLB presented barriers, potholes and resistance. However, a sense of urgency (Hall & Hord, 2006) for making AYP was in front of the staff to reach ever increasing

performance targets on the PSSA. When a shared vision was internalized by the staff and a mental model was created for success, the balanced literacy program became a reality.

There was considerable evidence from the study, that each school administrator adapted his or her leadership style to guide the staff through the organizational change process. This change in leadership style was a learned process as each respondent faced challenges with budget, staffing, resistance, transition, curriculum and best practices for instruction.

The portraits of the school administrators revealed leadership changes occurred as various obstacles were encountered. While they could not put a label on the individual change that happened, each evolved in a different way. Letting go of control and placing trust in the grade-level teams was not an easy task. However, as the participants became more comfortable with trust, teaming, data analysis and teaching guided reading with fidelity, a support role was adopted. The transformation in leadership gave the staff a sense of responsibility and respect as their voices were heard and opinions valued. Communication was a priority as NCLB mandates were addressed. Teachers felt buy-in for the literacy program when grade-level teams made revisions to the reading curriculum.

Teacher responses were critical for validation of the three portraits presented in this study. Several teachers noted changes in how the principal presented information to the staff and the support that was given even when the guided reading process was not going as planned. The fourth grade teacher

talked about how her principal allowed the team time in the schedule to plan and analyze data. Other teachers discussed how the principal creatively revised the schedule for intervention of the struggling readers. Professional development was also a topic shared by the teacher-participants. Even though the budget was tight, each school administrator found ways for the staff to be trained for personal mastery of guided reading. The goal for continuing to make AYP was a shared vision and a goal for student achievement for all students.

### **Recommendations for Further Study**

Since this case study presented portraits of school administrators in three rural Pennsylvania school districts, it does present certain limitations.

Implementing the legislation of the No Child Left Behind Act presented a sundry of issues for the participants. These participants used systems thinking, organizational change and changes in leadership to reach a goal for making continuous AYP and student achievement. Other school administrators could use the information gleaned from this study to create organizational change in their own schools. Following the process of change and understanding the source or resistance will be helpful for others who attempt to make broad changes to curriculum and instruction.

Secondary school administrators could apply the principles from this study to create a learning community in their school to increase student achievement. As the performance targets increase toward one hundred percent proficiency in 2014, stress and anxiety are placed on the implementation of the legislation. Additionally, secondary principals could be studied to determine how they

implement the mandates of NCLB and the effects of organizational change in their schools.

Another area recommended for further study is a comparison study of schools making AYP and those that do not make AYP. That type of research could further add to the research found in this case study to close a gap between elementary and secondary school administrators.

Since this case study focused on reading, a similar case study could be done with mathematics using a similar framework.

Researchers could replicate this study in urban or suburban districts where funding is more available and the tax base is higher. The population in an urban setting is more concentrated than that of rural areas and teacher attrition is low. Similar research questions could be asked of principals and teachers in urban schools to determine how they implement the mandates of NCLB.

### **Chapter Summary**

With enactment of the No Child Left Behind Act in 2002, schools have been placed under the stress of implementing the legislation and the unfunded mandates attached to the law. This qualitative study attempted to reveal how three rural Pennsylvania school administrators implement the mandates of the law while under the constraints of limited funding and resources. Interviews, PSSA scores, documents and field notes were used to gather necessary data for this case study. The theories of systems thinking, organizational change and individual change were highlighted in this study.

As the push for school improvement continues, it is necessary to explore ways for continued student achievement and progress. Through sustained organizational change, school administrators and teachers can reach goals for success. With an understanding of the whole system, a shared vision, personal mastery, mental models and team learning, sustaining organizational change becomes a reality for schools that learn (Senge, 2000).

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## Appendix A

### IUP Letterhead

#### School District Superintendent Site Approval

Dear Superintendent,

I am a doctoral student in the Administration and Leadership Studies program and Indiana University of Pennsylvania. I am conducting a study that explores the perceptions held by rural Pennsylvania school administrators (principals) as they implement the mandates of the No Child Left Behind Act. The data from this study will serve as my dissertation for completing a doctoral degree in educational. The over-arching questions for the study is: What account for the success of schools meeting Adequate Yearly Progress?

I am writing to ask your permission to interview the elementary school principal and three elementary teachers. It is necessary to receive site approval from you before conducting the interviews.

Each participant will be asked to engage in a 1 to 1 ½ hour interview at a time and place that is convenient for him or her. All information will be held in strict confidence and pseudonyms will be given to the participants and the school district.

If you agree to allow me to interview your staff, please state that permission of your district letterhead and return to me in the self-addressed envelope.

Thank you in advance for your help and cooperation.

Respectfully submitted,

Linda Dobbie

This project has been approved by the Indiana University of Pennsylvania Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (724/357-7730)

## Appendix B

### IUP Letterhead

#### Principal Informed Consent Cover Letter

Dear Principal,

I am a doctoral student in the Administration and Leadership Studies program at Indiana University of Pennsylvania (IUP). I am conducting a research study that explores the perceptions held by rural Pennsylvania school administrators as they implement the mandates of No Child Left Behind (NCLB). The data from this study will serve as my dissertation for completing a doctoral degree in education.

I am writing to invite you to be part of the study. If you consent, we would engage in a series of three interviews consisting of 45 to 60 minutes at a time and place that is convenient for you. After the first interview, which is audio taped, I will transcribe the information. After transcription, we will meet again to clarify or revise any information. This second meeting can be done in person or via the phone or email. You are permitted to refuse to answer any question during the interview process. Please know that I will always give you transcriptions for review to clarify or verify for accuracy. The third interview will follow up with PSSA scores and an open-ended discussion regarding the scores.

I will ask you to submit memos, faculty agendas, schedules, or any written text regarding the implementation of NCLB or PSSA testing to give your perspective on obstacles of dealing with the mandates. All materials will be kept confidential and returned to you after the study is conducted. Sharing these materials is strictly voluntary and at any time during the study, you may change your mind about offering the materials/artifacts.

All material shared by you will be kept locked in a filing cabinet in my home office for the duration of the study. I will ask you to sign a consent form (attached) before we begin the first interview. You may discontinue your participation at any time.

To be part of the study you must meet the following criteria:

\_\_\_\_\_ An elementary principal for two consecutive years in the same building

Appendix B

Page 2

Please send the signed consent form to my home address:

Linda Dobbie  
206 Oswald Road  
Tyrone, PA 16686

If you have any questions about participating in this study, please contact me by telephone or e-mail:

814-742-3305 (home)  
814-695-5584 (work)  
[LDobbie@AOL.COM](mailto:LDobbie@AOL.COM)

Thank you for considering the invitation to participate in my study

Best Regards,

Linda Dobbie  
|

Principal Investigator:  
Linda Dobbie  
Doctoral Candidate, IUP  
206 Oswald Road  
Tyrone, PA 16686  
Phone: 814/742-3305

Faculty Sponsor: Cathy Kaufman  
Professor Professional Studies in Education  
126 Davis Hall, Indiana University of PA  
Indiana, PA 15705  
Phone: 724/357-3928

This project has been approved by the Indiana University of Pennsylvania Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (724/357-7730)

Appendix C

IUP Letterhead

**Response Card for Participants**

Participant: \_\_\_\_\_

Please initial

I accept your invitation to participate in the research study. \_\_\_\_\_

I understand that I can withdraw for the study at any time. \_\_\_\_\_

Signature and Date \_\_\_\_\_

Best time to reach me. \_\_\_\_\_

Preferred email address \_\_\_\_\_

Preferred telephone number \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing address \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

THIS PROJECT HAS BEEN APPROVED BY THE INDIANA UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS. (724-357-7730)