A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE WAYS IN WHICH SELECTED NEW YORK STATE DISTRICT ADMINISTRATORS IN DISTRICTS IN NEED OF IMPROVEMENT RESPOND TO THE NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND ACT

By

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DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to central office administrators everywhere that are trying to get it right for the children. Ours is a noble calling. We must not get weary in well doing.
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CHAPTER I

Introduction

It has been more than 50 years since the passing of the landmark Supreme Court decision of *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* (1954; Fowler, 2004; O’Neil, 2004). In this 9-0 ruling, the Justices stated that the practice of “separate but equal” schools is unconstitutional. Separate but equal refers to the practice of racially segregating Whites and Blacks “as long as the facilities provided for Blacks and Whites are roughly equal. This doctrine was long used to support segregation in the public schools” (Hirsch, Kett, & Trefil, 2002, ¶ 1). The unanimous decision of *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) outlawed segregation in the public education system. In theory, it was to end the practice of giving minority students an unequal education. However, the phrase “with all due speed” gave districts a loophole to delay implementing this legislation. It was not until the passing of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 did Blacks truly have the backing of the federal government to force the desegregation of public schools, but simply desegregating the schools was not sufficient.

In many cases, forced busing and desegregation led to a phenomenon known as “White flight.” Families that could afford to withdraw their children from the schools and move to the suburbs did so, leaving a disproportionate number of poor families in the cities (Fowler, 2004). The suburban schools attracted highly qualified teachers leaving the less qualified and less experienced teachers to educate the neediest population of
students in the cities thus creating an even larger achievement gap (Darling-Hammond, 1996; Haycock, 1998). As families with students with limited English proficiency moved into the country, they often migrated to big cities in search of affordable housing. This resulted in urban schools and districts with a high concentration of minority, poor, and limited English proficient (LEP) students. In time, Congress wrote other legislation to try to “level the playing field”—the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1964 added funding and other resources to high poverty schools. Students with disabilities were “guaranteed” a public education with the Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The Goals 2000: Educate America Act, which President William Clinton signed into law on March 31, 1994, is another example of legislation whose aim was to improve the educational system and make sure that all students are given a high quality education. Despite these efforts, the statistics from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) show little change in the students’ fourth grade reading achievement between 1992 and 2002, regardless of race (Grigg, Daane, Jin, & Campbell, 2003, Rothman, 2001/02). The NAEP data, also known as the nation’s report card, shows that White students consistently outscored their Black and Hispanic counterparts on this elementary reading assessment. This difference in the achievement scores between the majority group and the subgroups is referred to as an achievement gap. This gap in achievement may exist by gender, race, income, language, or disability.

One such example of this achievement gap is in reading. The proficiency scale score on the National Education Assessment Program’s fourth grade reading assessment is 238; however, from 1992 – 2002, fourth graders read below this proficiency level (see Figure 1). In 2002, according to the Nation’s Report Card, 68% of the fourth graders
Figure 1. NAEP fourth grade average reading scale scores from 1992 – 2002.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity/Race</th>
<th>BELOW BASIC (Level 1) 2002</th>
<th>BELOW PROFICIENT (Level 1 &amp; 2) 2002</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>4th grade 60%</td>
<td>4th grade 88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>4th grade 56%</td>
<td>4th grade 85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian/Alaska Native</td>
<td>4th grade 49%</td>
<td>4th grade 78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian/Pacific Islander</td>
<td>4th grade 30%</td>
<td>4th grade 63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>4th grade 25%</td>
<td>4th grade 60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36% 4TH Graders</td>
<td></td>
<td>68 % 4TH Graders</td>
</tr>
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</table>
were reading below proficiency (refer to Figure 1 and Table 1). The same report (Grigg et al., 2003) showed that the problem extended throughout education: 64% of 12th graders never made it to the reading proficiency level (National Center for Education Statistics, 2003). The number of minority students failing to reach reading proficiency ranges from a low of 63% among the Asian/Pacific student population to a high of 88% of the African American students taking the 4th grade NAEP.

Research also exists showing the vast majority of students that are classified for special education in the elementary grades arrive there as a result of problems with reading (International Reading Association, 2003; Lyons, 2002). The U.S. Department of Education Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services confirmed this in the 2002 report:

> Of those with “specific learning disabilities,” 80 percent are there simply because they haven’t learned how to read. Thus, many children receiving special education—up to 40 percent—are there because they weren’t taught to read. The reading difficulties may not be their only area of difficulty, but it is the area that resulted in special education placement. Sadly, few children placed in special education close the achievement gap to a point where they can read and learn like their peers. (p. 3)

The statistics from the International Reading Association (IRA) (2003) also support this claim:

> By the late 1990s, about 50% of those students designated as in need of special education were labeled LD. This translates into 2.8 million children. (The proportion of school-age children so-labeled has risen from 1.8% in 1976-77 to
5.2% in 2001.) Reading and behavior problems were probably the largest source of the referrals that led to these students being so-designated (Lyons, 2002, Testimony before the Subcommittee on Educational Reform). Testifying before the U.S. Senate Subcommittee for Educational Reform in 2002, Robert Pasternack (Asst. Secretary for Special Education and Rehabilitative Services in the U.S. Dept. of Education) stated that 80-90% of those labeled as having a specific learning disability have their primary difficulties in learning to read, and “of the children who will eventually drop out of school, over seventy-five percent will report difficulties in learning to read.” (IRA, 2003)

Many of these students are classified as young as 5 or 6 years of age, often relegating them to a sub-par existence. Often, the expectations for students with disabilities (SWD) are very low.

If the goal of the previous legislation was to close the achievement gap and provide all students with a high quality education, then clearly it has failed. Ellis (2004, “What’s the Problem” ¶ 3) reinforced the severity of the issue with his claim that if schools fail “to give children confidence that they can learn to read by the time they are 8 or 9 years old you will have lost them for life. They cannot recover.” For many business leaders and politicians, this was yet another example of the crisis in public education. Their response, as in other times in history, was to implement a new policy. This resulted in the 2001 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). This new legislation, known as the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2001), brings a new level of accountability not only to the schools but also to local education agencies (LEA), otherwise known as school districts (Education Commission of the States, 2002).
A goal of NCLB is to “ensure that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education and reach, at a minimum, proficiency on challenging State academic achievement standards and State academic assessments” (NYSED, 2004b, “No Child Left Behind (NCLB)” ¶ 2). One principal focus of NCLB is improved reading skills. To help schools and districts ensure that all students are meeting these new standards the students’ results are disaggregated by the major subgroups—Blacks, Whites, Asians, Hispanics, Native Americans, Low-Income, Limited English Proficient and Students with Disabilities.

Based on these disaggregated data, throughout the country, district administrators are concerned with the academic performance of students attending their schools (Barkley, Bottoms, Feagin, & Clark, 2001; Greer, 2003; Reeves, 2004; Schmoker, 1999; Senge, 2000; Simon, 2002; Togneri & Anderson, 2003; Weinbaum, 2004). Headlines in the New York Times document states such as Texas and Michigan lowering their state standards so that more students are successful. Other states like Kentucky changed the scoring system to reduce the number of schools and districts in need of improvement (Dillon, 2003). Eric Witherspoon, Superintendent of Schools in Des Moines, Iowa wrote about the promises and shortcomings of No Child Left Behind in the Des Moines Register (2003). It is clear that student performance is under a microscope (Meier & Wood, 2004; Popham, 2004; Weinbaum, 2004). As a result, administrators are under more pressure to demonstrate that the children entrusted to their care are receiving a high quality education, where all students are supported to reach proficiency.
Prior to 2002, New York State implemented an accountability system that was largely targeted at Title I schools. Although all fourth grade students began taking State assessments in English Language Arts (ELA) in February 1999, only those districts containing Title I schools were sanctioned. Pre-NCLB, districts made adequate yearly progress (AYP) as long as 50% or more of their Title I schools made AYP. Districts were only identified In Need of Improvement if less than 50% of their Title I schools made AYP for 2 of 3 years. Prior to NCLB, no district ever required corrective action.

Starting with the 2003-04 school year, the federal government required New York State to implement a single state accountability system. Under NCLB, districts in New York State are treated equally. As is true for individual schools, in order for a district to meet AYP, at least 95% of all continuously enrolled students serviced in and out of the district must be assessed. This standard decreased the likelihood of districts restricting traditionally low-performing students, such as the special education population, from participating in the state assessments. In addition, according to the former Deputy Commissioner James A. Kadamus (2003), the districts and the schools must achieve at least one of the following criteria:

1. the performance of continuously enrolled students in the district/school and in each of the required subgroups meets or exceeds the appropriate annual measurable objectives for language arts and mathematics and the district/school meets the performance standard for science (elementary or middle level) or graduation rate (secondary level); or
2. any district, school, or student subgroup that did not meet or exceed the annual measurable objective makes "safe harbor," that is, compared with the previous year, the gap between the performance index and the goal of 200 on the performance index decreased by 10 percent, and that district, school, or student subgroup met the State performance standard for science (elementary and middle level) or graduation rate (secondary level). (p. 8)

It is the labeling and the wide dissemination of the students’ achievement data by district and school that has many educators, parents, and students concerned. They do not want their schools seen as “failing.” However, the philosophy behind this type of policy is that this wide dissemination of test scores will influence the educators, including central office administrators, to meet Adequate Yearly Progress.

In New York State under NCLB, Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP):

indicates acceptable progress by a district/school toward the goal of proficiency for all students [by 2014]. To make AYP, districts/schools must test 95 percent of students in each accountability group with 40 or more students. In addition, the Performance Index (PI) of each accountability group with 30 or more students must equal or exceed its Effective Annual Measurable Objective (AMO) or the group must make Safe Harbor. (NYSED, 2004c, p.2)

If the students’ achievement data or the data from one of the identified subgroups fail to meet AYP in multiple years, the district or school gets one of the following designations (NYSED, 2004c):

1. *Needs-improvement* - when a district or school that receives Title I funds fails to meet AYP for 2 years in a row in a subject area. Districts with this status are
required to notify the parents and submit a 2-year improvement plan that outlines what they will do to improve the students’ performance on the State assessments. They must provide Supplemental Education Services (SES) and school choice. For schools in need of improvement (SINI), the District may also replace school staff, institute a new curriculum, or restructure the school organization. If an entire district is identified in need of improvement (DINI) they may not provide SES. In New York State, if the district or school does not receive Title I funds this status is called, District (or School) Requiring Academic Progress (DRAP or SRAP). These schools are subject to the State’s regulations.

2. Corrective Action - when a district or school fails to meet AYP for 4 consecutive years

3. Restructure – when a district or school does not satisfy the AYP requirements for 5 years

The New York State Education Department (NYSED) distributes the fourth grade student cohort disaggregated test results to the media as a means of holding districts and schools accountable. If one of the subgroups within the school is too small to establish statistical reliability, for AYP purposes, the results are not reported. However, it is possible that the district could fail to meet AYP, because the district must aggregate the subgroup results from all of its schools. Consequently, the number of the students in the various NCLB-designated subgroups may increase to the point that the district must report the results (Education Trust, 2004; Meier & Wood, 2004; NYSED, 2004c; Popham, 2004).
Opponents of NCLB suggest this system of accountability is flawed and unfair (Meier & Wood, 2004; Popham, 2004; Schmoker, 1999). They argue that the need to meet AYP in all subgroups will classify a school or district as failing even though a high percentage of their students have met or exceeded the State requirements. NCLB may also unfairly penalize urban schools and districts that by nature have more subgroups that must meet AYP, thus giving the district more opportunities to “fail.” Once a district or school begins on a needs-improvement, corrective-action, restructure cycle, the parents and community at large may view it as a failing school. This designation brings economic and political ramifications. The school or district may lose control of funding as a result of school choice or be required to spend money for other service providers to tutor the students (NYSED, 2005c).

Need for this Study

Elliot H. Weinbaum found the following (2004):

Under this new law, districts will be expected to play a support role that has not yet been clearly defined. It will likely require re-design of some state assessment systems, increased monitoring and reporting of student performance and (for those districts receiving Title I funds), provision of technical assistance to under-performing schools, and sanctions for chronic failure. In addition, states will have to designate adequate yearly progress targets for whole districts (“No Child Left Behind Act,” 2001). Entire districts will, for the first time in many states, be the targets of sanctions and rewards based on overall and sub-group student performance. This new situation will likely increase pressure on central offices to
demonstrate improved student performance. However, these changes are being made without a clear understanding of what districts do when faced with pressure for schools to improve. (pp. 25, 26)

It is against the backdrop of reading and writing achievement gaps, poverty, district, and New York State accountability under NCLB that the researcher sought to provide new insights into the ways in which central office administrators in two districts tried to improve ELA achievement. Both districts were identified In Need of Improvement in elementary English Language Arts (ELA). In 1984, Clark, Lotto, and Astuto claimed, “school systems can and do improve, and the factors facilitating improvement are neither so exotic, unusual, or expensive that they are beyond the grasp of ... ordinary schools” (as cited in Schmoker, 1999, p. 1). The objective of this research was to document and complete a comparative analysis of the two districts’ responses to these new policy changes. The findings have implications for policy makers at the district, state and federal levels. The administrators’ actions shed light on the impact of these types of sanctions and rewards. It also helped to measure the effectiveness of the NCLB mandates. This is important from a policy position since the goal of NCLB is to move school districts into action to bring about improved education for all students.

Purpose Statement

“The primary responsibility for ensuring effective, ongoing, problem-focused dialogue falls to the district leadership. District leaders must initiate this dialogue and develop guidelines for making it productive” (Schmoker, 1999, p. 116). Although much research exists on the accountability for closing the achievement gap in individual
schools (Bergeson, 2003; Charles A. Dana Center, 1999), there is a need for more research on how central office responds to the requirement of demonstrating student achievement. Even though some research exists at the district level (Greer, 2003; Meier & Wood, 2004; Ragland, Asera, & Johnson, 1999; Talbert, Copeland, & Knapp, 2003; Togneri & Anderson, 2003; Weinbaum, 2004) most of these studies covered periods prior to the implementation of NCLB. In addition, the majority of these studies examined high-performing districts and schools.

The purpose of this exploratory study was to engage in an historical analysis of the local accountability systems and corrective actions put in place by central office administrators to address ELA achievement. The research consisted of a comparative analysis of the actions taken within and between two districts under review. Specifically, the researcher examined the corrective actions taken by central office administrators in districts that were identified in need of improvement in elementary ELA as a consequence of the No Child Left Behind legislation.

This study adds to the body of literature on the responses of central office administrators to the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001. The researcher looked at the actions taken in the district by central office from 1998-2005. The dates were chosen because they encompassed a period prior to and under the implementation of the NCLB legislation which was signed into law by President George W. Bush in 2002. The Central office administrators in the two consenting districts were interviewed. Each district was identified In Need of Improvement in Elementary English Language Arts (ELA). Grounded theory was used to analyze the data. A case study was developed on each district describing and analyzing the actions taken by central office administration to
improve their students’ scores on the Elementary English Language Arts Assessment given in fourth grade (ELA-4).

Prior to NCLB, the New York State accountability system focused more attention on building-level administrators, teachers, and students than on central office administration. After the implementation of NCLB, the New York State Education Department required central office administrators to play a greater role. The district administrators had to submit plans documenting how they would assist the district and schools in need of improvement. The researcher hypothesized that the district administrators had a greater sense of accountability for students’ achievement, and as a result, increased their own involvement and took more initiative to help improve student achievement in ELA.

*Research Questions*

This qualitative study answered the following questions:

1. How did central office administrators try to improve the students’ English Language Arts (ELA) achievement prior to No Child Left Behind (NCLB)?

2. How are the central office administrators responding to their districts being labeled in need of improvement in ELA under NCLB?

3. Why did the central office administrators institute the corrective actions chosen?

4. How have the corrective actions implemented by central office impacted the elementary English Language Arts achievement on the State assessment?
Conceptual Framework

Using the framework adapted from Weinbaum (2004) and Adams and Kirst (1999) as a guide, the researcher reviewed the related literature (see chapter 2). The following discussion explains the concept map depicted in Figure 2. The researcher used this context to analyze the data collected from the districts included in the study.

No Child Left Behind

The items that appear in bold type in the conceptual framework in Figure 2 are the items that the researcher examined in this study. The context for this concept map is the No Child Left Behind Legislation. The goal of this reauthorization of the Elementary Secondary Education Act is to improve student achievement and to decrease the gap between the different subgroups by increasing accountability from the State, district, and school levels (Armstrong, 2002; NCLB, 2001). NCLB includes four main components—accountability, teacher quality, instructional methods, options and choice for parents. The only focus of this research is what central office administrators did differently, if anything, in each of these areas.

State Accountability Policies

Prior to NCLB, New York State implemented a rigorous accountability system in response to the Goals 2000 legislation also known as Improving America’s Schools Act (IASA) (as cited in Hayes, 2004). To increase the pressure for improvement, the New York State Education Department (NYSED) designed sanctions and rewards based on the
growth or diminution of the identified gaps. However, like NCLB, the sanctions applied only to districts receiving Title I funds. In 1999, NYSED began publishing the students’ aggregate scores on the New York State assessments. NYSED made the school report cards widely available by sending them to the media and making them accessible on the World Wide Web. A major impact of NCLB is the new requirement to publish the disaggregated scores by subgroup of the entire cohort. “[T]he theory of action underlying accountability systems supposes that a quantitatively evident gap between required outcomes and current performance indicators will pressure educators to gear their practice toward the elimination of those disparities” (Weinbaum, 2004, p. 16). In other words, what gets assessed gets addressed.

District Corrective Actions

As each district responded to the pressures of NCLB and the State accountability system, outside factors influenced decision making in the district. Not only did the districts answer to the State Education department, and the federal government, they also responded to school board members, parents, unions, and the media. Often the responses were influenced by the following existing contextual factors: the students’ performance data, the existing leadership structure, the district’s resource use and allocation, the organizational structure, the size of the district, the district’s culture and history, the internal capacity or knowledge and skill of the staff, and finally the demographics of the community, staff and students. These contextual characteristics had a major influence on the way in which policies were adopted or adapted within the system (Fuhrman & Elmore, 1990; Fullan & Stiegelbauer, 1991; Hess, 1991; Spillane, 1996; Weinbaum,
Figure 2. Conceptual framework map (adapted from Weinbaum, 2004).
2004). The researcher included a description of these factors in the case studies presented on the two selected districts.

Previous research on district actions documents five areas in which districts take action to bring about reform, specifically their use of data, curriculum and instruction, professional development and resource allocation (Hayes, 2004, 1988; Massell, 2000; Murphy & Hallinger; Weinbaum, 2004). The researcher collected data on these variables and discussed each in the findings (see chapter 4). The analysis of each district also includes a “classification” of the type of power exercised within the district: centralized or decentralized. In addition, the researcher reported on the type of actions taken by the District administrators along the continuum: Type A or Type B (See Table 2). Weinbaum (2004) sees a relationship between the type of power exercised and the type of actions taken on the continuum; however, he does not necessarily see them as synonymous. See Table 2 taken directly from Weinbaum’s research (2004). In summary, in this study the researcher analyzed if each district operated from a point of centralization or decentralization and where the districts’ actions fell on the continuum of district responses listed in Table 2.

Many researchers have examined the importance of district support to school success (American Association of School Administrators, 2003; Anderson, 2003; Chrisman, 2005; Council of Basic Education, 2000; Elmore & Burney, 1997; Greer, 2003; Grove, 2002; Hightower, 2002; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2003; Ragland et al., 1999; Weinbaum, 2004). Leaders such as Dr. Carroll Thomas, one of the first Black superintendents in Houston, and Superintendent Anthony Alvarado, known for his work at New York City’s District #2 and subsequently as the chancellor of instruction in the
Table 2  
*Range of District Responses*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of continuia</th>
<th>Type A</th>
<th>Type B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interventionist to non-interventionist</td>
<td>Traditional “top-down” approach. Actively identifying challenges and possible solutions</td>
<td>Offer assistance when requested by schools (supporter)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active to Passive</td>
<td>Actively build capacity through professional development in areas in need of improvement</td>
<td>May have staff development, but not require staff to attend. Gives schools more autonomy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Differentiated to uniform/generic assistance</td>
<td>Meet individual needs of each school</td>
<td>One size fits all approach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prescriptive to non-prescriptive</td>
<td>Step by step (locus of control with the District)</td>
<td>Non-regulatory, allow the individual schools more freedom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aligned/coherent to unaligned</td>
<td>How well the set of improvement efforts are coordinated to focus on the teachers and administrators</td>
<td>Efforts are not aligned with specified goals</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
San Diego School District, are evidence of the way central office leadership functioned as a positive change agent in turning failing schools to successful ones as measured by state and local assessments (Anderson, 2003; Elmore & Burney, 1997). The literature suggests that in this age of standards, increasing expectations of students and high-stakes testing, the role of central office administrators is more important than ever before. District administrators must be active partners in education reform.

Definition of Terms

1. Academic Intervention Services (AIS) – Additional mandatory academic instruction which supplements the instruction provided in the general curriculum given to students that fail to meet the required achievement levels. In New York State, school districts must provide AIS to all students that score a Level 1 or Level 2 on the State assessments in reading, math, science and social studies (NYSED, 2004b).


3. Achievement gap – “term referring to differences in achievement among different racial, ethnic and socioeconomic student subgroups” (Education Alliance, 2004, p. 2).

4. Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) – “indicates acceptable progress by a district/school toward the goal of proficiency for all students [by 2013-2014]. To make AYP, districts/schools must test 95 percent of students in each accountability group with 40 or more students. In addition, the Performance Index (PI) of each accountability group with 30 or more students must equal or exceed its Effective Annual Measurable
Objective (AMO) or the group must make Safe Harbor” (NYSED, 2004c, p2).

Annual Measurable Objective (AMO) – is the required performance index that “each accountability group within a school or district is expected to achieve to make AYP.

The Effective AMO will be increased in regular increments beginning in 2004–05” (NYSED, 2005d, p. 4).

5. BOCES – Boards of Cooperative Educational Services - are public education collaboratives in New York State which function as extensions of local school districts. A BOCES is able to provide services that school districts may be too small to offer on their own or that would be more economical to offer collaboratively and share costs with other districts (BOCES, personal communication, 2005).

6. Bounded system –“Whatever ‘case’ is being studied is bounded by certain parameters such as location, time, political structure, etc. These parameters define or ‘bound’ the system or ‘case’ that is being studied” (Creswell, 1998).

7. Central Office – refers to the group of administrators that work at the district office such as: coordinators, directors, assistant superintendent for curriculum, and district superintendents. The term is used interchangeably with District administrators.

8. Continuously enrolled – refers to a student enrolled in school from BEDS day (the first Wednesday in October) until the date of the ELA assessment in their grade.

9. District Administrators – educational leaders that have New York administrative certification such as: coordinators, directors, assistant superintendent for curriculum, superintendents. The term is used interchangeably with central office administrators.
10. District in Good Standing – the district has not been identified as a District in Need of Improvement, Requiring Corrective Action, Planning for Restructuring, or Requiring Academic Progress. (NYSED, 2004c).

11. District in Need of Improvement (DINI) – In New York State a district is judged on the percentage of Title I schools in the district that met their annual improvement goals. If more than fifty percent (50%) of the district’s Title I schools did not make the annual yearly improvement (AYP) for two consecutive years in English language arts the district was identified as a District in Need of Improvement (NYSED – taken from sample DINI letter).

12. District Office – refers to the central administration of a district, consisting of the superintendent, assistant superintendents, curriculum coordinators, directors and other administrative staff with district-wide responsibilities.

13. Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) – are a set of standardized, individually administered measures of early literacy development. They are designed to be short (one minute) fluency measures used to regularly monitor the development of pre-reading and early reading skills.” (University of Oregon Center on Teaching and Learning, 2006)

14. ELA-4 – The New York State assessment in English language arts given to students in Grade 4.

15. Elementary School – schools that contain students in Grades K-5, K-6 or K-8

16. ESL (English as a Second Language) – the term is often used interchangeably with LEP (limited English proficiency)
17. Free Lunch – free or reduced price lunch provided to students who qualify based on their family’s income falling below the federal guidelines for poverty. This is one of the indicators used to measure the level of poverty within a district.

18. High-Performing School – An educational institution in which 80% students meet or exceed all applicable state standards in reading for two or more consecutive years.

19. High-Performing District – in this study the term is used to refer to districts whose scores on the Grade 4 ELA assessment places them in the top grouping of districts within New York State.

20. High-Poverty District – a district in New York State where 50% or more of its schools are designated as Title I buildings based on the free lunch rate.

21. High-Poverty School – institutions in which 50% or more of the student population qualifies for a free- or reduced-lunch.

22. High-Stakes Test – When consequences (rewards or sanctions) are attached to the results of an accountability system (Armstrong, 2004).

23. Learning Standards – Released in 1996, the learning standards are “descriptions of broad expectations of what students should know, understand, and be able to do at each grade level in seven subject areas as they progress through Grades K-12 in New York State schools. The Board of Regents established these standards” (NYSED, 2004c, p. 2).

24. LEP (Limited English Proficiency) – this term is often used interchangeably with ESL
25. Low-Performing District – for the purpose of this study, this term is narrowly defined to refer to districts whose scores placed them on the State’s list between 1999 and 2002 of districts needing improvement. This was prior to the implementation of NCLB.

26. Mandates – “a rule governing the actions of individuals and agencies” (McDonnell & Elmore, 1987, p. 138) which “usually consists of two components: (1) language that spells out required behavior for all people in a specified social group, and (2) a prescribed penalty for those who fail to comply” (Fowler, 2004, p. 250).

27. NCLB – No Child Left Behind – the short name given to the reauthorization of the federal Elementary Secondary Education Act of 2001.

28. New York State Assessment Tests – “refers to the series of standardized tests required by New York State, beginning in 1999, administered to all students in specified grades in specified subject areas” (Hayes, 2004, p. 21). For the purpose of this study, only the English language arts assessment administered in Grade 4 beginning in 1999 until 2004 will be included in the data.

29. Performance Index (PI) – “Schools are assigned Performance Indices (PIs) ranging from 0 to 200, based on the performance of students on the elementary- and middle-level State tests. Student scores on the tests are converted to four achievement levels, from Level 1 (indicating no proficiency) to Level 4 (indicating advanced proficiency). Schools are given partial credit for students scoring at Level 2 and full credit for students scoring at Level 3 or Level 4. They receive no credit for students scoring at Level 1. Schools improve their PI by decreasing the percentage of students scoring at
Level 1 and increasing the percentages scoring at Levels 3 and 4.” (NYSED, 2004c, p. 2)

30. Policy – “the expressed intentions of government actors relative to a public problem and the activities related to those intentions” (Dubnick & Bardes, 1983).

31. Policy Process – “the sequence of events that occurs when a political system considers different approaches to public problems, adopts one of them, tries it out, and evaluates it (Fowler, 2000, p. 13).

32. Proficient – a Level 3 “Score at or above the State reference point, but below mastery level” (Barth, Haycock, Jackson, Mora, Ruiz, Robinson, & Wilkins, 1999, p. 50).

33. Resource Allocation – the process of assigning funds, personnel, or material which can be used to achieve a goal.

34. Rewards – consequences for high or improving performance on high-stakes tests. In this study it is performance on the State ELA-4 assessment. These consequences may be directed at the students, schools, districts or states (Armstrong, 2004).

35. Safe Harbor – “an alternative means to demonstrate AYP for accountability groups that do not achieve their Effective AMOs. The safe harbor target is the PI value that represents the required level of improvement over the previous year’s performance” (NYSED, 2005d, p. 4). In elementary school the accountability group must also make acceptable progress in science.

36. Sanctions – consequences for low performance on high-stakes tests. These consequences may be directed at the students, schools, districts or states (Armstrong, 2004).
37. Socioeconomic Status (SES) – the financial status based on the eligibility for free lunch.

38. Standard Performance Index (SPI) – In New York State this represents the number of items a student, based on their performance on the test, would be expected to answer correctly if there were 100 items measuring each of the New York State English Language Arts (ELA) Learning Standards. The expected SPIs change from year to year depending on the difficulty of each year's test items. Therefore, it is not possible to compare SPIs from year to year without reference to a particular year's expected SPIs. Expected SPIs are published on the Office of State Assessment website (http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/osa), both in the annual technical report in the Publications Section as well as in the English Language Arts section (NYSED).

39. State ELA-4 Assessment - High-stakes New York State English language arts test given in Grade 4.

40. Student Achievement – for the purposes of this study, student achievement is the evaluation of students’ academic ability as measured by the State ELA-4 assessment.

41. Supplemental Educational Services (SES) – extra academic services provided to eligible Title I students outside of the regular school day (NYSED, 2005d).

42. Title I District – a district that receives grant funds based on its poverty rate which is determined by the percentage of students that qualify for free lunch.
Delimitations of the Study

The researcher sampled districts that were on NYSED’s list of districts in need of improvement (DINI) for elementary ELA in Spring 2005 (NYSED, 2005a, 2005b). An analysis was conducted on the two school districts that agreed to participate in the study. Both districts had the following characteristics:

1. Receive Title I funds - the federal NCLB regulations apply only to these districts
2. Access to 3 or more years of elementary ELA achievement data to provide performance data prior to NCLB and under the NCLB legislation
3. Labeled in Need of Improvement (DINI) for elementary ELA
4. Open enrollment – the districts do not have selective admissions policies
5. Majority of students in all subgroups tested 95% or higher - they did not exempt large numbers of students
6. Central Office with Superintendent, Assistant Superintendents for Curriculum and Instruction (or the equivalent), an Assistant Superintendent for Student Services (or equivalent), Assistant Superintendent for Personnel, Business or the equivalent in the participating public school districts in New York State, that agreed to take part in the study. I chose these administrators because they are most closely associated with the instructional program decisions and the authorization of curriculum and development, professional development, and the use of resources.
Limitations of the Study

1. The study of only public elementary schools limited the generalization of the leadership behaviors.
2. The results may not transfer to Districts in Need of Improvement in the area of math.
3. Participation in the study was voluntary; the researcher had no control over the number of respondents.
4. The sample may be biased since the results of the study were based only on the perceptions of central office administrators that agreed to participate in the study.
5. Many of the central office administrators did not work in the district prior to the implementation of No Child Left Behind. This limited the amount of data captured regarding the actions taken by district-level administrators prior to NCLB.
6. Finally, the study was limited to perceptions of district responsiveness to NCLB and state policies on elementary ELA standards and assessments only and therefore should not be applied to other domains of policy.

Organization of the Study

This first chapter introduced the concept of the study and the contextual framework. In chapter 2, the researcher gives a critique of the literature related to the study. Using the contextual framework, this literature review examines previous books, studies, and journal articles related to the researcher’s topic. The researcher describes the methodology used in the study in chapter 3. In this chapter, the researcher gives an overview of the steps taken to gather and analyze the data and conduct the study. Chapter 4 contains the findings from this research in light of the research questions and a
comparative analysis of the two districts. Finally, the recommendations for leadership, management, and policy as well as suggestions for future research appear in chapter 5. The appendixes contain a copy of the interview protocols, a list of the committee of experts, and sample copies of letters and permissions required for the research.
CHAPTER II

Literature Review

There is a preponderance of literature on the subject of improving student achievement, but much of it deals with change at the school level (Charles A. Dana Center, 1999; Education Trust, 1999). Research also exists on the effects of high-stakes accountability on schools in general (Firestone, Mayrowetz, & Fairman, 1998; Firestone & Pennel, 1993; Fuhrman & Odden, 2001; Kelley, 1999; Kelley, Conley, & Kimball, 2000; Kelley & Protsik, 1997; McNeil, 2000; Newmann, King, & Rigdon, 1997; Stecher, Barron, Chun, & Ross, 2000; Whitford, 2000). However, the existing literature on whole-district reform is not as abundant. It falls into two categories: (a) studies in which the researchers report that districts are unnecessary and in many ways get in the way of schools improving student achievement (Chubb & Moe, 1990; Finn, 1991) and (b) studies that reinforce the importance of the role of central office administrators (Anderson, 2003; Cromwell, 1998; Hayes, 2004; Ragland et al., 1999; Weinbaum, 2004). Moreover, there is little research on the impact of sanctions on low-performing schools and even less on the impact of these types of policies and specifically NCLB on entire school districts. In this literature review, the researcher seeks to explore the available body of knowledge on the topics related to the research questions listed in chapter 1. The researcher examined literature on accountability policies, the role of central office in district reform, data usage, resource allocation, professional development, planning, and finally, curriculum and instruction related to English Language Arts.
Accountability Policies

One of the major policy reforms from the federal government, aimed at improving student achievement in the public school system was the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 (Goertz, Duffy, & Carson-LeFloch, 2001; Hayes, 2004; Weinbaum, 2004). At the core of ESEA, is the notion of educational equity—equal opportunity for instruction and learning for all students. This legislation, signed into law by President Lyndon Johnson shortly after the passing of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, introduced Title I and Title II funding into high poverty schools with the intent of leveling the playing field for disadvantaged students. It gave funds for special programs for children from low-income families (Title I), financial support for instructional materials and supplies (Title II), and aid for children with limited English proficiency (Title VII). Schugurensky (2002) reported:

All of these acts allocate funds and stipulate rights for all children receiving an education. Without the ESEA much of the educational progress that has been made, specifically in Bilingual Education, would have been delayed or even worse stifled. As President Johnson stated the ESEA offers "new hope to tens of thousands of youngsters" since it provides students with trained professionals and resources that are required for an appropriate education. (p.176)

The ESEA of 1965 proved to be a catalyst for future educational legislation. A few of the pivotal acts that derived from the ESEA include the Title VII Bilingual Education Act (1968), the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (1990), and the Goals 2000: Educate America Act (1994). However, Berlak (2005) asserted:
At the time ESEA passed it was widely presumed that a basic value of US democracy was that schooling of the young was a local community responsibility. While the states set guidelines, and provided funds and oversight, specific pedagogical and curricular decisions were mostly left to teachers, principals, districts, and locally elected governing boards… Most ESEA funds went directly to the local authorities thereby bypassing the authority of the states' education officials and departments of education. (The Rise and Fall of the ‘Great Society’, ¶ 7)

The advent of federally funded educational programs, such as Title I, required districts to account for their fiscal management. Nevertheless, the responsibility for student achievement remained a local school issue. The accountability systems put in place were largely interested in the inputs. Districts self-reported on these inputs such as facilities, pupil-teacher ratios, their fiscal management of federal funds, per-pupil expenditures, the use of certified teachers, the existence of a curriculum, the special education program, and the like (Fowler, 2004; Fuhrman & Elmore, 2004).

New Accountability

The 1980s marked a change in educational policy. The scores reported for the students in the United States on the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS, 2003) and the Progress in International Literacy Study (PIRLS) did not meet expectations. Public education came under severe criticism with the publishing of the Nation at Risk (Cook, 2001; Fowler, 2004; Fuhrman, 2001; National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983; Ravitch, 1995). In the Nation at Risk, the commission
put the blame for students’ inability to help American businesses compete in the global market place on the public school system. As a result, the commission called for greater concentration on the core subjects: English, math, science, and social studies. One recommendation emanating from the report is students should take 4 years of English and 3 years each of the other core areas rather than electives. The National Governors’ Association report entitled *Time for Results* (1986) called for greater accountability from the educational community. As a result, the business community and politicians banded together to demand a different level of accountability from the schools. They turned to the business model for solutions. Consequently, the focus of the accountability systems changed from inputs to outputs; the “bottom-line”, high standards and academic achievement for all.

*Standards Movement*

The new emphasis on outputs led to a call back to the basics. The trend in the 1990s was for performance-based accountability in the four core areas. With the public’s new attention to the “bottom-line” of education, they demanded test scores as “evidence of achievement.” This movement marked a shift in the nature of the educational accountability systems. The establishment of high standards for all was encouraged by the Goals 2000: Educate America Act, signed into law by President William Clinton in 1994. “Goals 2000 established a framework in which to identify world-class academic standards, to measure student progress, and to provide the support that students may need to meet the standards” (North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, 2005, ¶ 2). New York State published their standards, what students should know and be able to do,
in 1996. By the 1999-2000 school year, high academic standards existed in all but one state (Goertz et al., 2001). To measure the students’ attainment of these standards, the majority of the states instituted criterion tests. This was a departure from the norm-referenced tests, popular in the 1970s and early 1980s. In 1999, the New York State Education Department began assessing students in math and reading in Grades 4 and 8 (Goals 2000, 1994; North Central Regional Education Lab, 2005). They published the results on “school report cards.” These first report cards reported only on the aggregated results. Now with the onset of No Child Left Behind (2001), districts must report their disaggregated results to the public.

The climate of the times helped to create this “new accountability.” For the first time in New York State, in 1997 small city districts began voting on a portion of the school budget. After a decade of plenty in the 1990s, communities began experiencing tough fiscal times. This drew even more attention to the public school systems. Community members wanted a good return on their investment. Many rationalized that if business had results like those found in many schools, it would warrant a take over of that business. Consequently, the same logic spilled over into the new accountability systems. This 2001 reauthorization of ESEA included rewards and sanctions. NCLB demands that all students reach proficiency in math and reading by 2014. States are required to incrementally “raise the bar” to ensure that by 2014, all students reach the goal of proficiency. The school districts that fail to meet adequate yearly progress multiple years may be subject to a take over or removal of staff.
An essential component of high-performing districts is high expectations for all students (Grove, 2002; Johnson, 2002; Ragland et al., 1999). Central office staff can help to set this tone within a district. Unfortunately, despite evidence to the contrary (Cawelti, 2003; Education Trust, 1999, 2003), too many educators still believe if students are Black, or come from families with low socioeconomic status, they are not capable of meeting the new standards of excellence set forth by the various states. They feel the odds are against these students, and thus holding them to higher academic standards is a hopeless battle. Moon, Callahan, and Tomlinson (2003) reported:

Teachers tend to have lower expectations for students from impoverished backgrounds and they often formulate these expectations before they have significant interaction with students. Teacher suppositions are based on their knowledge of students' test scores, tracking or ability placement, and previous teachers' comments (Gonder, 1991; Lumsden, 1997; Ornstein & Levine, 1989; Pajares, 1992; Solomon, et al., 1996). As a result, teachers are apt to deliver instruction based on a different, simplified curriculum (Ornstein & Levine, 1989), often reinforcing the drill-and-practice of basic skills while ignoring higher-order thinking skills that enable complex and meaningful learning to occur. In essence, teacher expectations of students from impoverished backgrounds devalue the educational opportunities provided to these students. (Introduction ¶ 3)

Consequently, many well-intentioned teachers and administrators make comments such as, “I have difficulty with the standards because they’re so unattainable for so many of our students…We just don’t have the same kids they have on Long Island or Orchard
Park” (Simon, 2002, p.B1). President George W. Bush referred to this as the “soft bigotry of low expectations.” President Bush boasted the merits of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. The legislation states that the purpose of NCLB is to close “the achievement gap between high- and low-performing children, especially the achievement gaps between minority and nonminority students, and between disadvantaged children and their more advantaged peers” (20 U.S.C. § 6301; Campbell, Hombo, & Mazzeo, 2000; Donahue, Voelkl, Campbell, & Mazzeo, 1999; Jencks & Phillips, 1998).

Although high achievement for all students is the goal of NCLB, proponents of the law are quick to point out unmet promises (Armstrong, 2004; Johnston & Viadero, 2000; Popham, 2004). At issue for many critics is the heavy reliance on tests to measure accountability. Any states receiving Title I funds must have students take part in the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). NCLB requires that all states test at least 95% of their students in Grades 3-8 in reading and math. This includes students with disabilities. Currently, only the lowest 1% of the special education population is exempt from the state assessments. These students take an alternative assessment. New York State is in the process of developing another assessment for an additional 2% of the special education population. However, the State Education Department is still working on the guidelines to determine which students will be eligible for this new assessment. It will be a minimum of 2 academic years before districts have access to these new alternate assessments. Once the Commissioner of Education determines the criterion, the State Education Department will begin the lengthy test development process. According to Kurt M. Landgraf, President and Chief Executive Officer of the Educational Testing
Service, “[d]one properly, test development usually takes about 18-24 months, including refinements to the test form” (Educational Testing Services, 2001, p. 8).

In many states, these assessments are high-stakes test. Administrators make decisions regarding promotion and graduation based upon these scores. For example, in Florida, teachers cannot promote third graders to fourth grade until they pass the FCAT (Florida’s Comprehensive Assessment Test). To regain instructional time, many districts in Florida have eliminated recess.

“An almost inevitable result of high-stakes accountability is a more focused, but also more narrow curriculum” (Berry, Turchi, Johnson, Hare & Owens, 2003, p. 16). Opponents of the NCLB legislation argue that this policy will result in students that are good test-takers. However, they fear students will lack the critical thinking skills and creativity necessary to be successful in the Information Age.

**Student Achievement**

Before proceeding, it is important to acknowledge the “elephant in the middle of the room.” In this study, student achievement was referred to specifically as progress on a single high-stakes test. It is important to note that not everyone agrees with this notion of student achievement including the researcher. However, with the onset of standards for all students and NCLB, it appears that tests are here to stay. States will continue to use test results under NCLB to affix a rating to a school or district.

The notion of testing is a topic of considerable debate (Berlak, 2001; Burke & Lombardi, 1998; Creech, 2000; Ediger, 2000; Kober, 2001; Meier & Wood, 2004;
Nichols, Glass & Berliner, 2005; Reid, 2002). Numerous issues are discussed in this debate:

1. test bias against minorities and students from low-income homes
2. narrowing of curriculum through an emphasis on “drill and kill”
3. standardized test for non-standardized students
4. high-stakes nature – retention decisions based upon results
5. purpose of education
6. need for multiple measures of achievement versus one test

Indeed, districts and schools should be measuring much more. In response to all the testing, a not-for-profit organization called FairTest is working to promote “fair, open, valid and educationally beneficial evaluations of students, teachers and schools” (FairTest, 2006, ¶1). This National Center for Fair & Open Testing (FairTest) is also working to “end the misuses and flaws of standardized testing practices that impede those goals” (FairTest, 2006, ¶1).

Whole-District Improvement Planning

Studies are beginning to appear that show districts that are successfully meeting these high goals. One factor high-performing districts have in common is an internal system of accountability for learning (Charles A. Dana Center, 1999; McKay, 2003; Popham, 2004; Ragland et al., 1999; Reeves, 2004; Togneri & Anderson, 2003). Using data and measurable goals to create a sense of urgency, whole districts are embracing focused goals to address the needs of the students. In New York State, many districts create Comprehensive District Education Plans (CDEP). The body of research and
professional literature includes focused school improvement planning as an essential quality of high-performing districts (Barkely et al., 2001; The Charles A. Dana Center, 1999; Danielson, 1996; DuFour, Barbara, Fullan, McTighe, & Schmoker, 2002; Leedy & Ormod, 2001; McKay, 2003; Schmoker, 1999).

The goal of this study was to determine if district-level administrators took a more active role in setting the course for improvement in their districts since the implementation of NCLB. The researcher examined self-reports and historical data such as memos, policy statements, and meeting minutes to determine the role that district administrators played in raising student achievement on the elementary ELA assessment. In addition, the researcher examined resource allocation prior to NCLB and once NCLB was implemented. It is vital that administrators know how to make good use of the available human and material resources (Hemphill, 2000; Ragland et al., 1999; Shannon & Bylsma, 2004).

Research on District Response to Accountability Policies

In the researcher’s review of the literature, (Adams & Kirst, 1999; Hayes, 2004; Shannon & Bylsma, 2004; Togneri & Anderson, 2003; Weinbaum, 2004) five works came to the forefront. The first was a theoretical framework discussed by Adams and Kirst (1999) entitled, *New Demands and Concepts for Educational Accountability: Striving for Results in an Era of Excellence*. The authors described:

> In an ideal system, performance-based accountability focuses educational policy, administration, and practice directly on teaching and learning. Accountability accomplishes this alignment, in principle, by defining goals,
allocating authority, managing incentives, building capacity, measuring progress, reporting results, and enforcing consequences, all related to student performance.

(p. 464)

After discussing different types of educational accountability systems—bureaucratic, legal, professional, political, moral, and marker—Adams and Kirst (1999) discussed six themes that cut across all accountability types. These themes are: (a) identifying principals and agents, (b) authorizing action, (c) managing agents’ productivity, (d) defining accounts, (e) promoting agent compliance, and (f) ensuring causal responsibility.

Weinbaum’s work continued these themes. His research, part of a larger study by the Consortium for Policy Research in Education (2001), studied the state accountability systems found in Pennsylvania and North Carolina. Within each state, he did a case study of two different districts and the impact of each state’s accountability systems on the improvement of high schools. In addition, Weinbaum placed the district’s response to the State accountability systems on a continuum (Refer to Table 2). Although Weinbaum’s research extended the themes described by Adams and Kirst, he used data gathered prior to the implementation of NCLB, thus still leaving a gap in the literature.

In another study, Hayes (2004) examined New York State Policy and District Responsiveness using data from the 2001-02 school years. The criterion variable in this study was the district performance on the state assessments. She used the predictor variables: district size, district socioeconomic status (SES), and district responsiveness. In addition to using descriptive statistics “to classify and summarize the numerical data” from the questionnaire, the Hayes study used a linear regression to test the null
hypothesis (Hinkle, Wiersma, & Jurs, 2003). Hayes’ examination of the data found that there was no statistically significant relationship between student achievement on the state tests and the district’s level of responsiveness. It did confirm what other studies have that the district SES is a strong predictor of student achievement. However, this study also covered a period prior to the implementation of NCLB. Another gap in the study is the lack of participation from small districts. Although Hayes’ study supported the existing studies on the impact of district size, (Firestone et al., 1998; Hannaway & Kimball, 1997), the lack of data from small districts renders her study incomplete. This may underscore the difference in capacity of small districts versus medium- and large-size districts. It is an area requiring additional study.

Finally, an extensive study by Shannon & Bylsma (2004) collected and analyzed over 80 articles and research studies from the past 10-15 years, then distilled the information down to “13 common themes, which have been clustered into four broad categories: Effective Leadership, Quality Teaching and Learning, Support for Systemwide Improvement, and Clear and Collaborative Relationships” (Shannon & Bylsma, 2004, p. 1). Shannon and Bylsma’s work gives credence to the research methodology this researcher is proposing. They report that the studies included in their analysis were largely “descriptive based on case studies” (2004, p. 1).

The studies shed light on the relationship between school district policy, programs, and practices and the improvement of student learning. The studies focused primarily on districts that have shown improvement at the elementary level … Moreover, these reports provide examples of school districts that are
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<th>Study</th>
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<th>Sustained improvement efforts</th>
<th>High expectations for adults</th>
<th>Aligned curriculum &amp; assess</th>
<th>Coordinated/embedded professional dev</th>
<th>Quality classroom instruction</th>
<th>Effective use of data</th>
<th>Strategic resource allocation</th>
<th>Policy/program coherence</th>
<th>Prof. culture &amp; collaboration</th>
<th>School &amp; district roles/relations</th>
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X indicates them is explicitly discussed in the report.

* indicates the theme is strongly implied.

*Figure 3. Shannon's and Bylsma's matrix of ten research studies.*
making substantial progress in improving student learning at one point in time. Because school districts are complex systems within the contexts of states and communities, the strategies discussed in these studies may not be applicable in other settings. Therefore, they should not be considered prescriptions to follow but rather ideas to consider. (Shannon & Bylsma, 2004, p. 1)

Within their report, Shannon and Bylsma (2004) included a matrix highlighting 10 research studies from the over 80 studies they analyzed. The selected reports were representative of the themes and actions taken by districts to improve student achievement. “This cross section of reports illustrates themes that emerge related to districts’ policies, programs and practices for improving student learning” (p. 90). A copy of this matrix appears in Figure 3.

Grounded Theory Analysis

Many of the research studies examined in this literature review, for example, Togneri (2003) and Weinbaum (2004), relied on a methodological approach that allowed them to build theory regarding a certain phenomenon in educational settings. The approach, made famous by Strauss and Corbin (1998) is known as Grounded Theory. Martin and Turner (1986, p. 141) referred to grounded theory as an “inductive theory discovery methodology that allows the researcher to develop a theoretical account in empirical observations of data.” As mentioned in the previous section, Shannon & Bylsma (2004) also used this approach with their meta-analysis to examine over 80 studies. Their findings were a result of applying the three phases of grounded theory: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding.
As the researcher developed this study, she was informed by the themes and categories described in other studies on district reform efforts by researchers that preceded her. Having this background knowledge of existing ideas about themes related to district reform helped inform the researcher’s analysis of the actions taken in the two selected districts. Figure 3 provided a visual of the themes and subcategories Shannon and Bylsma (2004) discovered in many of the studies they examined. As the researcher analyzed the data from the two districts, she looked for the common themes discussed in previous studies while allowing for new ideas to emerge from the data collected. In this way, the thinking involved with the grounded theory was both inductive and deductive.

Summary

A review of the literature reinforced several of the beliefs held by the researcher in regards to actions districts in need of improvement might take to help their schools improve student achievement. Many of the districts in the literature provided strong instructional leadership, implemented comprehensive district-wide planning, and goal-setting. These districts also set high expectations for all, developed curriculum and assessments that were aligned with the state’s standards, and ensured that the teachers were effective and highly qualified.

Researchers looked at areas such as the district’s socioeconomic statues (SES), responsiveness of the districts in relation to their size, the district leadership, and the impact of state policies to name a few. However, gaps still exist in the literature in regards to the response of central offices when their districts have been labeled in need of improvement under No Child Left Behind (2001). In addition, a large percentage of the
studies have been done on medium-size or large districts. These two areas—district size and impact of NCLB—are factors that were under review in this study.

The findings reported in the various studies and professional literature support the ability of the central office administrators to influence the academic achievement of each child. Although some scholars differ on which factors are most important, they all agree if conditions are right, students can and do learn. This study supports these claims.

The researcher hypothesized that the two districts in this study would “take back control” from the schools and implement district-wide reforms to improve ELA achievement in their district. Through this study, the researcher adds to the body of knowledge of what district administrators across New York State do to impact student achievement in ELA under the NCLB policy. With the onset of the No Child Left Behind Act (2001), the hope of many is that this legislation will do what many before were unable to do, hold central office staff accountable for closing the achievement gap and bring a high quality education to all.
CHAPTER III

Methodology

The researcher conducted this study to discover how central office administrators in New York State responded when their local educational agencies were labeled as Districts in Need of Improvement in English Language Arts at the elementary level. To locate potential participants the researcher obtained a list of districts that met the criteria set forth in chapter 1 from the state’s website. Letters were sent to the 20 eligible districts. From the districts that responded, the researcher chose two for inclusion in the study. Thus, the sample consisted of central office administrators that worked in the two districts. These districts provided information-rich cases whose study illuminated the four questions:

1. How did central office administrators try to improve the students’ English Language Arts (ELA) achievement prior to No Child Left Behind (NCLB)?
2. How are the central office administrators responding to their districts being labeled in need of improvement in ELA under NCLB?
3. Why did the central office administrators institute the corrective actions chosen?
4. How have the corrective actions implemented by central office impacted the elementary English Language Arts achievement on the State assessment?

Research Design

The research design chosen for this time-bounded, non-randomized qualitative research was the case study. This was an appropriate methodology given the questions
under review. How and why questions are open ended in nature and allow for a range of responses from the participants (Gillham, 2004; Merriam, 1988; Yin, 1994). The case study design enabled the researcher to capture how the district administrators responded to a new phenomenon, namely, being labeled in Need of Improvement under No Child Left Behind. This design offered a holistic view of the decisions made by central office to improve elementary ELA achievement under NCLB. The researcher collected documentation, archival records and interview data on how and why the selected administrators took the reported actions in their districts.

Researcher’s Role

This investigator has been in education for 14 years of which the last 6 years have been in administration, first as a Coordinator of Model Schools and then as Director of Elementary Education. Her position as the Director of Elementary Education, a central office job in a small-city school district currently identified in Need of Improvement in ELA in New York State, made her “sensitive to the context.” Her duties include reviewing test data from the New York State assessments and assisting building principals in conducting root-cause analysis of the students’ results. From these data, there is a determination of district- and building-level goals, strategies, and corrective actions for the building leadership teams to include in their plans for implementation. The Director’s responsibilities also encompass the coordination of textbook adoptions, purchases of other curricular materials, and arranging for professional development opportunities for the staff. As the Director in charge of the reading department and the site coordinator for the Reading Recovery training site, this researcher is knowledgeable
in the area of English language arts. In addition, the researcher has taken multiple courses in statistics and research. A copy of the researcher’s vitae is available in Appendix A. This background and work experience proved invaluable as the researcher conducted interviews, read district documents, and reviewed tests data for patterns and themes.

Recruiting Procedures

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) deals with the ethical, regulatory, and policy concerns of using human subjects in research. After obtaining approval from Seton Hall’s IRB, the researcher used multiple approaches to recruit subjects. First, an initial e-mail was sent introducing the researcher and the study to each potential participant. The e-mail contained the letter of solicitation and the informed consent form (see Appendix B). The letter:

1. Indicated the researcher’s association with Seton Hall University
2. Explained the purpose of the study in lay terms
3. Included a statement of the voluntary nature of their participation
4. Described the procedures and the expected demands of their time
5. Included sample questions
6. Included how the researcher secured and kept the data confidential

The researcher also sent a copy of the letter of solicitation and informed consent form via U. S. Postal Service first-class mail to each person. Each letter was followed up with a phone call. All the individuals that participated in the study did so voluntarily.
The Sites

The two selected districts were chosen because they represent different types of districts in New York State: a high-needs small-city school district and a high-needs small-rural school district. Although the districts had different demographics and types of locations, there were also features that were similar between the two districts. It is the mixture of the similarities and differences that the researcher thought would make an interesting comparison.

All names and locations were changed to protect the identity of these school districts and the subjects. The districts are identified simply by Small City District W and Small Rural District T. To help the reader quickly associate an administrator with the appropriate district all District W employees’ surnames start with a W and all employees from District T have surnames that start with the letter T.

Small City District W

Contextual Characteristics. This small-city school district is a consolidation of several small towns and villages located in upstate New York. The district is approximately 90 miles from a major metropolitan area and is situated in the county seat. At present the county is trying to work out of an economic slump that occurred when, in the mid ‘90s, a Fortune 500 company closed leaving thousands without jobs. The closure put economic hardships on many entities including the school district. “The area is working hard to rebuild the economic base to supply employment and to revitalize the economy” (CDEP Plan, personal communication, June 15, 2000). The school district is now the major employer in the district with over 1400 faculty and staff, of which over 600 are teachers. A number of retail stores and service agencies have since located there.
Consequently, many of the residents work in these service-related and retail industries. This resulted in demographic changes to some of the schools within the district.

From 2002-2005, Small City District W had a slight increase in its limited English proficient (LEP) population from 4.6% ($n = 8166$) to 7% ($n = 8037$). Prior to the 2005-06 school year only one elementary school serviced the LEP students. In 2005 the district added services to another elementary school to handle the growing LEP population.

According to the 2005 State report card, Small City District W had 8037 students with 73% White, 17% Black, 7% Hispanic, 2% Asian, and less than 1% American Indian. The Pre-K through fifth grade averages 3795 students. Thirty-eight percent (38%) of the students were eligible for a free or reduced lunch rate. As a result of their demographics, the district is held accountable for the general population and four student subgroups: Blacks, Whites, students with disabilities (SWD), and economically disadvantaged students.

Small City District W is classified by the New York State Education Department as a category 3 high-needs urban or suburban district because of its high student needs in relation to district resource capacity. “The Need/Resource Capacity Index” was developed by:

- assessing each school district’s special student needs and ability to provide resources relative to the State average.…. In particular, it recognizes that certain districts in addition to the Big 5—whether small city, suburban or rural – serve extraordinarily large numbers of educationally disadvantaged children who have not been given full opportunity to learn and succeed (NYSED, 2004a, p. 9).
In 2002-03, the district-wide total expenditure per pupil was $12,117. This was lower than the State. The average spending in all New York State public schools during this time frame was $13,085.

The percentage of students with disabilities is higher than the 13% state average. In Small City District W over 15% of the student population have Individual Education Plans (IEPs). The Assistant Superintendent for Student Services indicated that as of December 1, 2004, 1300 students were classified.

In 2000, there were 10 elementary schools in the district. The 11th school, Fanny Ship, was re-opened in the 2001-02 school year as a Pre-K through second grade building. Each year the district added another grade until it became a Pre-K through fifth grade building in 2004-05. The district now has 11 elementary schools: two pre-K-5 and nine K-5 buildings. Each elementary school is considered a “neighborhood” school. These 11 schools feed into two middle schools and ultimately one high school.

**Mission statement.** The mission statement defines the district’s identity and purpose. Like many other areas within this district, in the last 5 years the mission statement changed. In Fall 2001, Mary Worse a central office administrator, used the district’s mission statement on the opening page of the Staff Development In-service Offerings book. It stated, “Within a safe learning environment every student upon graduation will possess the academic and extra-curricular skills for success in college, work and life.” By 2003 the mission statement was revised to say:

It is the mission of Small City District W to educate, inspire, and graduate students who are excellent in scholarship and character and are empowered to
reach their maximum potential as responsible and productive members of society (website, 2005).

School board. The district climate and decisions cannot be examined without also looking at central office administrators’ relationship with the Board of Education (BOE). Small City District W is governed by a 9-member BOE. In this district, the relationship between BOE and the superintendent was often contentious. For example, at different times in the past 5 years the BOE changed curricular decisions made by central office administrators. In the past 10 years, no less than three central office administrators had their contracts bought out.

In addition to dealing with leadership changes, during the 2003-04 school years, the district was forced to operate on a contingency budget. In May 2004, the budget was once again defeated; however, the revised budget passed when it was put up for a second vote in June 2004. In May 2005, the first budget narrowly passed with less than 75 votes.

Central Office. There were significant changes over the past 6 years in the personnel and organizational structure of Small City District W’s central office. The Director of Support Programs (October 28, 2005) indicated that there was a “lack of consistent leadership at the district level until 2002.” Between April 2001 and 2003, there were five different superintendents acting or otherwise.

The current superintendent’s cabinet consists of four assistant superintendents: the Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction; the Assistant Superintendent for Student Services, the Assistant Superintendent for Personnel and Administration, and the
Assistant Superintendent for Business & Operation position which became vacant in September 2005. The position will not be filled again until the 2006-07 school year. In the interim, the other assistant superintendents and the district treasurer are sharing his job responsibilities.

In Spring 2002, the Assistants Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction restructured her office to the current positions. Although the job descriptions were written in May 2002, it took time to fill all of the administrative positions in the curriculum office. The new Director positions placed an emphasis on technology skills and the ability to analyze data and conduct root cause analysis. Now, reporting to the Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum & Instruction is a Director of Elementary Education, a Director of Secondary Education, a Director of Support Programs, a Director of Enrichment and Fine Arts, a Director of Athletics, and a Math, Science, Technology (MST) Coordinator. The coordinators are teachers on special assignment. On the district’s organizational chart there is also an ELA Coordinator position; however, the position was vacant at the time of this study.

The Office of Student Services also underwent personnel changes. By September 2005, the administrative positions in this office were also filled: Committee on Special Education (CSE) Chair, an Assistant CSE Chair, two Special Education Coordinators, and a Prevention Specialist. They are responsible for ensuring that services are provided to over 1300 students with Individual Education Plans (IEPs) K-12.

Although there are over 10 central office administrators in the district, only five were interviewed for this study. One of the administrators contributed only documentation, signified by the dashed line (see Figure 4 and Table 4).
Small Rural District T

Contextual characteristics. Small Rural District T is located in the county seat of a small city near the center of New York State. It was once a flourishing community of more than 7,000 citizens. The district has a PreK-12 enrollment of 2380 students and approximately 210 instructional staff. There are four schools in the district: “primary school building PreK through 3; and then there’s an elementary building that’s 4, 5, and 6; and the middle school 7, 8; and high school 9-12.” (T. Thomas, personal communication, October 13, 2005).

The school is the center of much activity in the small city and surrounding townships. The academic achievements of Small Rural District T’s students are important to parents and the community. As a result, they get involved with their school community. While on a contingency budget during the 2004-05 school year the community raised money to reinstate extracurricular activities that were cut from the budget.

This district is classified as a category 4 high-needs rural school district. The district is not diverse. The student population is 96% White, 2% Black, 1% Hispanic, and less than 1% Asian and American Indian. According to Human Resources, this is what makes this area “unique.” She commented that the lack of diversity in their student and staff populations was one of their big challenges.

The community suffered an economic setback when a large Fortune 500 company closed its door in the late ‘90s. This resulted in the loss of hundreds of white collar jobs. Several working professionals were forced to leave the area for new jobs. According to
the 2000 census, there were 7,355 residents. This was down from the 7,613 residents reported on the 1990 census. Consequently, the teachers observed a change in the background of the students served by the district:

There were a lot of big companies, but they’ve all left; so, with that, part of our clientele. Now we are an area …where people who have needs come, not people who have money or education. (K. Treever, personal communication, November 2, 2005).

In Small Rural District T, the number of students eligible for a free or reduced lunch rate steadily increased from 2001 to 2005. Information on the district’s school report card indicated that the free and reduced lunch rate went from a low of 33% in 2001-02 to a high of 51.4% in the fall of 2005. The 2003-04 state report card indicated that the special education population was 16% of the student population \( n = 2286 \). This was higher than the state average which was 13%.

**Mission statement.** The mission statement was retrieved off Small Rural District T’s website on December 4, 2005:

Through the use of all available resources, it shall be the Mission of Small Rural District T to produce productive citizens who can successfully collaborate and compete in a global society... to develop and provide for each enrolled student a program of experiences, activities and services designed to ensure maximum opportunities for life-long intellectual, psycho-social, personal and physical growth. It shall further be the Mission of the District to ensure the delivery of such experiences, activities, and services within an interpersonal atmosphere
marked by order, warmth and genuine concern for each individual's well-being as well as appropriate physical environments which support and contribute positively to learning.

_School board._ Small Rural District T is governed by a 7-member Board of Education (BOE). In July 2005, the BOE hired a new superintendent. (The previous superintendent’s contract was bought out.) Since then, two school board members were replaced. The existing school board is “99.9% supportive of strong educational programming. And, I think everyone has come to their senses that they were in a bad place, and they don’t want to go back to that bad place anymore” (District T Superintendent, personal communication, October 13, 2005).

_Central Office._ From 2001 – 2005 there were numerous changes in job descriptions, positions, and personnel. When the superintendent was interviewed in October 2005, he indicated that he had only been in the district for 3 months. Prior to coming to Small Rural District T, he was superintendent in an even smaller district in upstate New York. The Director of Instruction and Staff Development came to the district in 2003 from the area BOCES. “The Director of Special Programs… is the fifth special ed director in four years” (T. Thomas, personal communication, October 13, 2005).

Prior to the implementation of NCLB, the superintendent’s position was stable. The superintendent, Dr. R. Teveland, was in the district for approximately 20 years. He left the district in 2001. The superintendent that replaced him was only in the district a
few years. The current superintendent, Mr. Thomas, acknowledged that he had to learn more about the district:

I’ve gotta learn the history of this district a little bit better. This district is just one year off a contingency budget. One year off buying out the old superintendent. He was here, for I believe, 3 ½ - 4 years. The prior superintendent was here 20 years. With the past 3- or 4-years … I believe from the data … that I can see and the people I talk to, the focus was taken off a lot of the educational issues [with people] worrying about a contingency budget. A lot of bad things happened to, a [lot of] good people. A lot of my job right now is to repair [the] damage to the systems… (T. Thomas, personal communication, October 13, 2005).

In 2003, the location of the central office was moved from Main Street to a business resource center in the middle of the city. The move was very controversial; it appeared to be one of the issues that led to a politically charged environment. During this time there was turnover in the building administration and the teaching staff.

At the time of this study, the central office staff included a Superintendent, Deputy Superintendent, Director of Instruction & Staff Development, Director of Special Programs, and a Director of Technology and Information Services. The district also had Human Resources; however, this was part of their confidential unit not an educational administrative job. Human Resources was included because of the role played in helping the district meet the High Objective Uniform State Standard of Evaluation (HOUSSE) requirements. Although the person in Human Resources had been in the district 11 years she had no insights into the other areas of interest: planning, data usage, curriculum and instruction, professional development, or resource allocation.
When asked about her role, the Director of Instruction & Staff Development indicated:

I pretty much handle anything dealing with professional development of any kind and instructional programming, which includes the development of curriculum, the choosing of instructional materials, [and] assessment systems. ... I handle all the field experiences that go in and out of the district and anything else the superintendent deems necessary. You know the little clause at the end of your job description. I do not write the grants, but I do coordinate some of the spending of them. (R. Tree, personal communication, October 14, 2005).

The Director of Special Programs is responsible for a number of things from “observing teachers, to CSE meetings, to 504s, to ESL, gifted, the whole gamut” (K. Trever, personal communication, November 2, 2005).

Data Collection

Data were gathered between October 2005 and December 2005. The use of different data sources in qualitative studies is critical to ascertain the empirical reality. The researcher utilized the Freedom of Information Law (FOIL) to request access to several of the documents. The sources of data collected for this study included:

1. Archival artifacts
2. Interview data
3. Documents (i.e., memos, district policies and practices, meeting minutes, evaluation sheets, curriculum maps, budget sheets, and organizational charts).
Interview Procedures

The investigator viewed the districts’ websites and other primary and secondary sources—such as the district’s state report card, internal memos, professional development offerings—to gather demographic and test score information. With this information the researcher adapted the interview questions to the specifics in each district. The interview guide (see Appendix C) contains a separate set of questions for:

1. superintendents
2. individuals in charge of curriculum and instruction
3. individuals in charge of professional development
4. individuals in charge of data
5. other district administrators

In the districts that participated in this study, one person was responsible for data, professional development, and the curriculum and instruction. In this case, the questions were merged to create a hybrid interview guide. Sample interview questions included:

1. What are the District’s goals for its elementary school ELA curriculum? And, for how long have these been their goals?
2. How are the central office administrators responding to the district being labeled in need of improvement in ELA at the elementary level?
3. How is what your district doing now different from what you did prior to NCLB?

Another example of modifications made to the interview guide was when participants were not in the district long enough to answer some of the questions. For example, the Superintendent of the Small Rural District T was only in the position for 3 months. His questions were modified to take into consideration his limited time. Instead
of asking what he had accomplished, the researcher asked the superintendent to express his vision for the school district.

Qualitative interviews provide a framework to capture how the respondents view their world. It provides opportunities for outsiders to learn the terminology and judgments, and to capture the complexities of their individual experiences and perceptions. In this study, the interviews were conducted by three people: the researcher \((n = 4)\), research assistant #1 \((n = 3)\) and research assistant #2 \((n = 2)\). An interview guide adapted from Weinbaum (2004) provided the framework for each interview (see Appendix C). The purpose of Weinbaum’s interview guide was to ascertain the actions taken by central office to implement state accountability policy at the high school level. Many of the questions were open-ended allowing the subjects to use their own terminology to define what was happening in their districts. This researcher’s purposes were similar to Weinbaum’s; however, instead of investigating what the central office administration did to respond to state policy at the high school level, the researcher adapted the instrument for use with central office administrations in relation to the changes, if any, implemented at the elementary level to improve ELA scores under NCLB. The researcher presented this instrument to a committee of experts (see Appendix D). The committee consisted of an assistant superintendent from an area BOCES, a superintendent, and an assistant superintendent in a public school district. The researcher modified the tool based on the recommendations received from the committee.

The open-ended interview questions focused on NCLB and the corrective actions taken to improve elementary ELA scores. Sample questions included: “What are the major strategies that the district is adopting or using to improve ELA student
achievement in its elementary school? What programs or resources does the district offer or provide to help elementary schools to improve instruction in ELA? What programs are specifically targeted to underachieving schools or students?"

Prior to sending the research assistants to the districts to talk with the participants, the researcher met with each assistant to demonstrate how to use the recording device and to discuss the way in which the interviews should be conducted. The researcher encouraged the assistants to follow the basic structure of the interview guide and to rephrase questions, ask clarifying or follow-up questions when appropriate. The following excerpt taken from one of the transcripts is an example of a follow-up question:

"Earlier you spoke about how, in our demographic conversation, our elementary schools are so different; but do these goals and challenges differ for different elementary schools in the district? (Researcher, personal communication, October 27, 2005)"

The Participants

All the individuals that participated in the study did so voluntarily. The researcher assured each participant of the confidentiality of their responses. In total, nine interviews were conducted. There were five (5) people in Small City School District W and four (4) in Small Rural District T: two Superintendents, an Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction, an Assistant Superintendent for Student Services, an Assistant Superintendent for Personnel, a Director of Instruction/Staff Development, a
Figure 4. Participating Central Office Administrators in Small City District W.
Table 3

*Experience of Participating Administrators in Small City District W*

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*Note.* *Not interviewed – supplied documentation and artifacts*
Figure 5. Participating Central Office Administrators from Small Rural District T.
Table 4

*Experience of Participating Administrators in Small Rural District T*

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Small City District W Position</th>
<th>Total Number of Years as a:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superintendent</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director of Instruction &amp; Staff Dev’t.</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director of Special Programs</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Human Resources is a management position – She has been in this district 11 years
Director of Special Programs, a Director of Support Programs, and Human Resources (see Figure 4 and Figure 5.) The range of experience varied amongst the participants (see Table 3 and Table 4).

Two of the interviews were done via conference call and the others were done in a face-to-face meeting. The length of the interviews ranged from 20 minutes and 40 seconds to 71 minutes and 50 seconds; however, the average interview length was 44 minutes. To assure validity the researcher utilized two research assistants to help conduct the interviews. The responses elicited were similar across the three interviewers. A SONY digital recorder (IC Recorder ICD-ST25) was used to tape the interviews.

Although the subjects were not anonymous during the interview, the researcher ensured their anonymity by assigning codes to their transcriptions. A backup copy of the recordings was stored on the researcher’s laptop utilizing the Digital Voice Editor software that accompanied the digital recorder. Having the recordings made the researcher’s task of accurately transcribing the participants’ responses easier. Upon completion of the study, the researcher destroyed all of the recorded interviews.

**Grounded Theory Analysis and Case Study Data**

Once the interviews were transcribed, the researcher imported the data into the QSR NVivo© data management software. This was an effective tool for use in this qualitative study. Grounded theory analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) was used to identify the major themes that emerged from the interviews. Grounded analysis is a systematic approach for looking at transcripts of in-depth interviews (qualitative data). There are three basic components of grounded theory: concepts (the basic unit of analysis of the raw data into
common labels); categories (higher level and more abstract than the concept labels); and finally propositions (the generalized relationships between the concepts and categories). This was a messy process and one that required several iterations for the major threads to come to the surface.

The researcher read each transcript numerous times, then wrote in the margin of the pages of the transcripts or typed her initial thoughts and comments in the memos section of the QSR NVivo© software. Using these ideas she created her first list of codes for use in the QSR NVivo© software to codify the data and identify patterns. This is known as the open coding phase (see Figure 6). This figure is a visual representation of the open codes or labels that were assigned to various sections of the transcripts during the coding process. A complete listing of the codes and their descriptions appears in Figure 8 and Figure 9.

The next step required grouping the related codes or labels into major themes and subcategories (see Figure 7). This figure shows the beginning process of grouping the codes identified during the open coding process as the researcher read through the texts of the transcriptions. It is important to note that Figure 7 is not complete, nor does it show the interaction between the nodes. This is described through the themes in chapter 4. However, Figure 7 does show how the researcher, through coding, began to connect the nodes.

The concern with this level of coding is on causal relationships. The objective of this phase of the data analysis was to answer the questions of who, what, where, when, why, and how. As the researcher read and re-read the transcripts, she used inductive and deductive reasoning to determine how things fit together. This stage is known as axial
Figure 6. QSR NVivo initial model of open coding.
 NODE LISTING

Nodes in Set: All Free Nodes
Created: 12/4/2005 - 12:59:43 AM

Number of Nodes: 24

  1 CONTEXTUAL
    Description:
    12/04/05 - Contextual items - admin experience, history, demographics, etc...

    2 CUSTOMER_SERVICE
    Description:
    12/04/05 - Theme - examples of customer service central office staff

    3 NCLB_ATTITUDES
    Description:
    12/19/05 - Attitudes regarding the NCLB policy and its impact/effectiveness

    4 PLANNING_PROCESSES
    Description:
    12/05/05 - Passages that relate to planning processes that were in place or put in place within the district.

    5 PROVIDE_LEADERSHIP
    Description:
    1/13/06 - role of central office to provide leadership

    6 Q1_CIA
    Description:
    12/04/05 - Curriculum Instruction and Assessment PRIOR to NCLB

    7 Q1_DATA
    Description:
    12/04/05 - Information regarding data under research Q1

    8 Q1_PD
    Description:
    12/19/05 - professional dev't practices prior to the implementation of NCLB

    9 Q1_RESOURCE_ALLOCATION
    Description:
    12/04/05 - Resource Allocation PRIOR to NCLB

    10 Q1_STATE_ED
    Description:
    12/04/05 - Relation with State Ed PRIOR to NCLB

    11 Q2_CIA
    Description:
    12/04/05 - Curriculum Instruction and Assessment UNDER NCLB

    12 Q2_DATA
    Description:
    12/04/05 - Information about the use of data under NCLB - in DINI districts

    13 Q2_PD
    Description:
    12/04/05 - Professional Development UNDER NCLB

    14 Q2_RESOURCE_ALLOCATION
    Description:
    12/04/05 - Resource Allocation UNDER NCLB

---

Figure 8. Coding used in qualitative study.
15 Q2_STATE_ED
Description:
12/04/05 - Relation with State Ed UNDER NCLB

16 Q3_CIA
Description:
12/04/05 - Reasons why curriculum instruction assessment options were chosen

17 Q3_DATA
Description:
12/04/05 - Why they used data the way they did

18 Q3_PD
Description:
12/04/05 - Reasons why particular Professional Development

19 Q3_RESOURCE_ALLOCATION
Description:
12/04/05 - Reasons why Resources were allocated the way they were

20 Q4_HOW_ITS_WORKING_IMPACT
Description:
12/04/05 - 4.How have the corrective actions implemented by central office impacted the elementary English Language Arts achievement on the State assessment?

21 RECOMMENDATIONS
Description:
12/05/05 - Recommendations for changes - State Ed, School District, Community, etc...

22 REVOLVING_DOOR
Description:
12/7/05 - Discussion about the changing central office administration in a very short timeframe.

23 SAME_BOAT
Description:
12/04/05 - All in the same boat now - talking about requirement of all students to meet same standards, expectations, etc.

24 TESTS_ARENTVERYTHING
Description:
1/28/06 - Administrators spoke of their concern about the emphasis on tests... Realize education must be more than this

Figure 9. Coding used in qualitative study continued.
coding. Examples of the axial codes include “NCLB”, “District Role in Supporting ELA Improvement”, “Administrative Responsibilities” and “Challenges.”

The last part of the analysis process is selective coding. This is the integration of all major themes and subcategories into one overarching core category. This category provided the basis of the “storyline” for the written analysis. In chapter 4 the researcher discusses this core category along with the other findings from the analysis of the data.

Chapter 4 contains the multiple-case report. The researcher reported the findings using the major themes built upon in the analysis. Following a theory-building compositional structure, the researcher wrote the case reports (Yin, 1994). To write the narrative for the two case studies the researcher used the selective coding. The actions taken by the district-level administrators to address the ELA needs were described in each case. The researcher identified important relationships and quotations that provided evidence to support the findings. Chapter 4 concludes with a cross-case comparative analysis of the district administrators’ responses in the two selected districts. The researcher used descriptive statistics to describe some of the data collected. The analysis in chapter 4 also includes tables and figures. Finally, chapter 5 contains the conclusions and recommendations for future research.
CHAPTER IV

Findings

To facilitate the reporting of the data this chapter is divided into three parts. The first section contains the findings from the first case, Small City District W and the data from Small Rural District T is reported in the second section. The organization of these first two sections is identical. Each section presents a brief overview of the problem and then concludes with the reporting of the findings from the district. The final part of this chapter is a comparative analysis of the actions taken by the central office administrators in the two districts. The interpretation of these findings, conclusions and recommendations for future research are included in chapter 5.

Case 1: Small City District W

The Problem

In fall 2004, Small City District W was identified as a District in Need of Improvement in elementary ELA. In other words, the fourth grade elementary students within the district failed to make sufficient improvement in their English Language Arts scores. Specifically, the special education students failed to reach the Effective Annual Measurable Objective (AMO) of 123 or the ELA Safe Harbor Target of 107, which signifies a 10% increase from the 2003 ELA results. The AMO is the score that is used by New York State to determine if districts are in need of improvement under the federal rules. Since this was the second year in which the students with disabilities (SWD) did
not make ample progress, this local education agency became a District In Need of Improvement (DINI) under the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) guidelines.

Table 5 contains a comparison of the mean scores on the ELA assessments over the past several years. The total population and all the other student subgroups: Blacks, Whites, and students eligible for free or reduced lunch also met AYP (see Table 6). However, the data showed that a gap still existed between Black and White students. According to the 2005 reports from Small City District W administrators, Black students \( (n = 103) \) had a mean score of 651.87, while White students \( (n = 412) \) had a mean score of 667.79. This gap was statistically significant at the .05 level. There was also a gap between economically disadvantaged students and students that were not economically disadvantaged. Compare the mean scores from the two subgroups with the mean scores received on the ELA assessment from all the students within the district, similar schools and the entire state (see Table 5).

Table 5

*ELA Mean Scores for District W, Other Small City Districts and the State*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>District W Mean</td>
<td>652</td>
<td>661</td>
<td>662</td>
<td>659</td>
<td>659</td>
<td>656</td>
<td>664</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Similar Districts</td>
<td>637</td>
<td>648</td>
<td>650</td>
<td>653</td>
<td>655</td>
<td>651</td>
<td>659</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>653</td>
<td>653</td>
<td>659</td>
<td>660</td>
<td>656</td>
<td>Not available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small City District W</td>
<td>2000-01</td>
<td>2001-02</td>
<td>2002-03</td>
<td>2003-04</td>
<td>DINI – 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Population</strong></td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>n</strong></td>
<td>633</td>
<td>579</td>
<td>671</td>
<td>592</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>General-ed</strong></td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>n</strong></td>
<td>544</td>
<td>492</td>
<td>555</td>
<td>493</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Special-ed</strong></td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>n</strong></td>
<td>89</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>99</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Econ. Disadvantaged</strong></td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>n</strong></td>
<td>138</td>
<td>204</td>
<td>290</td>
<td>251</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Not Disadvantaged</strong></td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>n</strong></td>
<td>495</td>
<td>375</td>
<td>381</td>
<td>341</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Black</strong></td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>n</strong></td>
<td>88</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>109</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>White</strong></td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>n</strong></td>
<td>498</td>
<td>443</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>431</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>New York State</strong></td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>N</strong></td>
<td>215,037</td>
<td>212,820</td>
<td>211,313</td>
<td>211,313</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Performance Index (PI) is determined by counting the percentage of the students that scored a level 3 or 4 twice and then adding the percentage of students that scored a level 2. Students that scored a level 1 are not counted. The formula for the PI is the number from the percentage of: $4s + 3s + 2s + 3s + 4s$. The PI ranges from 0-200. For districts to improve their PI they must decrease the percentage of students scoring a level 2 or 1. The ultimate goal is for all students to score a level 3 or 4 on the ELA state assessment. This would result in a PI = 200. The PI for Small City District W from 1999-2005 appears in Table 7.

Table 7  

*Performance Index for Small City District W*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>District W</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>166</td>
<td>166</td>
<td>161</td>
<td>161</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>158</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>Not available</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 10. Axial coding leading to selective coding.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondents in Small City District W</th>
<th>District Role in Supporting ELA Improvement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Superintendent</td>
<td>Contextual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Demographics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Administrative Experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>BOE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Climate - Love children, High Expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Effective Leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Meet needs of Individual Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Data Analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pros</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NCLB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Curriculum, Instruction &amp; Assessments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Planning Processes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Data Use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Resource Allocation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Professional Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asst. Supt. For Curriculum &amp; Instruction</td>
<td>Curriculum Alignment / Audits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asst. Supt. For Student Services</td>
<td>Collection of Benchmarks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ass. Supt. Personnel &amp; Administration</td>
<td>Use of Software</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director of Support Programs</td>
<td>District Goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Collaborative Planning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Data Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Decision Making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Disaggregated Data to Focus Needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Human Resources, Class Size, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Process (HOUSE, hiring, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Funding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Curriculum, textbooks, software</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Challenges</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sustained Professional Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Provided within District</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Provided to Support District &amp; Building Goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Designed to Support District &amp; Building Goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Provided by outsiders (BOCES, etc.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

X indicates theme was discussed or implied in the interview
Theory Building

Using the three-pronged grounded theory approach (open coding, axial coding and selective coding), the researcher pored over the interviews, artifacts, and documents collected from Small City District W. Some of this process was revealed in chapter 3 (see Figure 6, Figure 7, Figure 8 and Figure 9). Figure 10 shows further analysis of the data into axial and selective codes. It reports the findings by respondent. The overarching theme was “customer service.” The following narrative highlights this customer service theme by showing the many ways that central office acted on behalf of the students, their customers.

May I help you…?

“If people don’t understand that we’re providing a service then they don’t know why central office exists other than to collect a fat pay check” (Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction, personal communication, October 28, 2005). The “district’s role is to really be a service provided in supporting each of the buildings at the elementary school” (Director of Support Programs, personal communication, October 29, 2005). “[A]re we, as a district, doing everything we can to provide the best services for students, in whatever category they’re in?” (Assistant Superintendent Pupil Personnel, personal communication, October 12, 2005).

Customer Service was one of the overarching themes found in the responses from the central office administrators in Small City District W. It was generated from the interview question, “What do you see as the district’s role in supporting elementary schools?” Their responses indicated an attempt to make the job easier for the principals and teachers in their district by rendering various “services” that may impact student
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>May I help you…</th>
<th>Superintendent</th>
<th>Assistant Supt for Personnel &amp; Administration</th>
<th>Assistant Superintendent for Student Services</th>
<th>Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum &amp; Instruction</th>
<th>Director of Support Programs</th>
<th>Director of Elementary Ed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do the data analysis</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use the data (data-driven decisions)</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Select Programs</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be an effective leader</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meet the needs of individual students</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be a better educator</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Get more resources</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve academic intervention services</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* The Assistant Superintendent for Business Operations’ position was vacant at the time of this study.
achievement in ELA (see Table 8). The Assistant Superintendent for Student Services indicated:

I think [central office], as the hierarchy in the administration, need to also be supportive of them [principals] and make sure they have the tools that they need to then train, and assure that their staff are doing the job to the best of their ability within their classrooms. If we haven’t done that then we’re asking them to do something where our expectations are too high. (S. Walsh, personal communication, October 12, 2005)

The “services” the district administrators provided were directed towards its staff and not the students per se. The services included analyzing data, arranging professional development, securing resources, and hiring staff to help improve ELA instruction in the district. However, the students still appeared to be the customers. The district seemed to take the stance that as “leadership” they must make sure their staff is doing everything in their power to ensure that the customer (the students) are satisfied (meet the state standards). Depending on the effectiveness of the first level manager (principal) the level of support would be increased or decreased. As a result, the administrators’ underlying motto seemed to be, “May I help you…?” The following sections show how the data supported this customer service theme.

Do the Data Analysis

An excerpt from the May 14, 2002, Elementary Cabinet Meeting Minutes notes that the curriculum department experienced changes in order to meet the data needs in the district:
She (Fran Wisher) is still working on reorganization of the curriculum and instruction unit. Current staff (such as Sharon Wise, Gelman Whitman and Mary Worse) will have to apply for the new positions and go through the whole hiring procedure with some of the coordinators [teachers on special assignment] being able to skip this as their job remains fairly the same. Job descriptions are being developed. Art and music need to be worked out (with the [administrative bargaining unit’s] concerns noted). At present it seems principals are reporting to Fran [the Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum & Instruction].

Although the job descriptions were written in May 2002, it took some time to fill all of the administrative positions. The Director of Athletics and Mary Worse were the only administrators that kept their jobs. Worse’s title, however, changed from Director of Staff Development to Director of Support Programs. Her job now encompassed staff development and all the federal grants such as Title I, Title II, and the 21st Century Grant. The Director of Humanities and the Director of MST were replaced with the Director of Elementary Education who was hired in October 2002, and the Director of Secondary Education who was hired in November 2004. Each of these new directors were required to have technology skills that would facilitate the creation of data reports and the ability to conduct root cause analysis for the district. The Director of Elementary Education’s job description explicitly stated that she must have “technology skills at the proficient level” and “experience in data analysis and reporting” (see Appendix E). In September 2005, the Director of Enrichment and Fine Arts was hired. Now, reporting to the Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum & Instruction is a Director of Elementary Education, a Director of Secondary Education, a Director of Support Programs, a
Director of Enrichment and Fine Arts, a Director of Athletics, and a Math, Science, Technology (MST) Coordinator (see Figure 11 and Figure 12). The coordinators are teachers on special assignment. On the district’s organizational chart there is also an ELA Coordinator position; however, the position was not filled in 2006 at the time of this study.

When the Director of Elementary Education was hired in October 2002, she began collecting ELA-4 test scores and other information on the students such as: attendance, mobility, preschool experience, reading supports received (i.e., reading recovery or remedial reading), participation in summer school, number of retentions, and the number of times they had new teachers. This information formed the basis of the root cause analysis that was provided as a service to the five lowest performing schools within the district.

The students’ mobility was an area of concern in this district. The district defined mobility to mean students that moved between schools within the district as well as students that moved into Small City District W from outside of the district. This trend was most prominent in the Title I buildings but also crossed over to some of the non-Title I buildings. To compound the mobility issue, the last district-wide adopted text for ELA was in 1996. The basal had a 1992 copyright date. It was printed prior to the publication of the Report of the National Reading Panel: Teaching Children to Read (National Institute of Child Health & Human Development, 2000). As such, the reading series sanctioned by the Board of Education (BOE) did not have all the recommended components:
Figure 11. 2002 Small City District W organizational chart.
* Humanities position was vacant in 2006

*Figure 12.* 2006 Small City District W organizational chart.
1. phonemic awareness
2. explicit, systematic phonics instruction
3. fluency
4. comprehension
5. vocabulary

Many teachers began supplementing the adopted program with other materials. Several teachers abandoned use of the program all together. In one elementary school a new program, Open Court, was unofficially adopted by the K-3 classes. With 11 elementary buildings and scores of teachers, the curriculum varied from building-to-building and in some cases, class-to-class. As a result, when students moved within the district the transition was often difficult for students because there was no consistency in program across the district. The move from one school to another often resulted in gaps in the students’ learning. Consequently, the district administrators decided to adopt an ELA curriculum for Grades K-3. Through an extensive review process, the Director of Elementary Education led the primary teachers through the textbook adoption. The Harcourt Trophies program was selected. In 2004-05, the district purchased Trophies for Kindergarten through second grade. The third grade received the books in 2005-06. In conjunction with the adoption of the new reading series, the Director of Elementary Education crafted a District Literacy Position Statement (see Appendix F). The Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction indicated:

This was mainly produced because we have a mobility problem in our elementary schools… and we had an outdated English language arts curriculum. We adopted a new ELA textbook series. We felt it [was] important to put together a position
statement to let people know that we do expect that there be a continuum [in the ELA program the students receive] so that in buildings where we have a lot of newer teachers, or maybe teachers that aren’t master teachers…, [they can] rely on the tools at hand. (F. Wisher, personal communication, October 27, 2005.

Data Use

There was considerable evidence of data use in Small City District W. Prior to NCLB, the district collected perceptual data by using the Effective Schools surveys. Principals also received scores from the State assessments. However, the major difference was that central office did not work with the data collected to the extent that they do now; the principals did the work. There was no evidence of root cause analysis being conducted prior to NCLB that drilled down to the individual student level; nor was their evidence of a focus on the performance of subgroups. It appears that prior to the implementation of NCLB, the only disaggregated data that was reviewed in the district were the state scores for students with disabilities and economically disadvantaged students.

The Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction pointed out that New York State has had a testing system in place for decades. “Interestingly enough, you know our Commissioner was really data driven even before No Child Left Behind. It’s not quite as much as a shock. We had a little more lead time” (F. Wisher, personal communication, October 27, 2005). “What I think it’s done is allowed us to focus more because initially this data was only available for the entire population. Once you drill down you see the individual subgroups” (M. Worse, personal communication,
October 29, 2005). “The only way we should ever view data is there’s no such thing as a piece of data. They are students attached to a data set. There’s a face attached to a score” (F. Wisher, personal communication, October 27, 2005).

As a result of the lack of expectations for students with disabilities, no one really questioned why special education students did not meet the state standards prior to NCLB. However, under NCLB high expectations for all students became a focus of the curriculum department. The Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction remarked that no one in her office was allowed to say, “These kids can’t.” An information sheet handed out at a district-wide second grade meeting on October 5, 2004, reinforced this idea. At the top of the sheet the Director of Elementary Education typed a comment from a superintendent from North Carolina: “Accentuate the Positive! Yes, parents may have the greatest impact on how their children come to us. But we have the greatest impact on how they leave us.” Central office administrators refused to allow the teachers to blame the students or the parents. At the end of the page, the recommended reading was the book entitled, *Who Moved My Cheese? An Amazing Way to Deal with Change in your Life* (Johnson, 1998).

**Program Selection**

Since NCLB, the district administrators have used data to make program selections. The Assistant Superintendent for Student Services was asked, “What are the major strategies the district is adopting or using to improve student achievement in its elementary schools?” Her response talked about the use of data in the decision-making process:
We’re looking for, and adopting, scientifically-based research. That’s a big one. NCLB requires that … any interventions that we do are scientifically-based. The problem is that there’s not a lot of demonstrated initiatives out there that … have a track record that can show that students have been successful because, [or] due to the implementation of this program. We just adopted FastForword® into certain schools and we’re piloting right now. The success rate of that has been tremendous; but, we’re just making some assumptions based on … the preliminary data that we have. We don’t know that all students are gonna benefit from it. We haven’t screened that out yet. But at least it’s a starting point. Do we need to also do the same thing in ELA? Yes! Right now our major thrust is Reading Recovery in district. There’s many people who feel either one way or another [about Reading Recovery], and everyone’s knowing we’re using this, that it’s not scientifically-based research. There [are] pros and cons to how [Reading Recovery] has truly impacted students. So, I think that knowing the requirements for NCLB, we really have to work hard to find programs or find initiatives because we’re always going to be in that conversation then in terms of did it really work? Was it really … this initiative that impacted students. Unless we can show by data support … that this is truly [the reason] … why students achieved the way they did… [we should not use the program]. (S. Walsh, personal communication, October 12, 2005)

Under NCLB, the Director of Elementary Education routinely collected ELA-related data such as student writing samples, DRA scores, and feedback regarding the types of professional development the teachers wanted or needed. Not only did she
encourage teachers to use data for their own use, she modeled this in her own practice.
For example, she worked with the reading department to create a reading survey that the
K-5 elementary teachers completed. The results from this survey were used to design
ELA staff development. The superintendent’s remarks also support these findings:

Fran Wisher … works very closely with her department people, namely the
Director of Elementary Education who is Cherie Wild. As the central office staff,
they are able to take a look at the data, come up with… innovative ideas [and]
suggestions as to how those [ELA test] scores can improve. (G. Winger, personal
communication, October 27, 2005)

The Assistant Superintendent for Personnel had some reservations about how
successful the district was in utilizing the data. He thought the district was “slow on the
uptake of utilizing that data to the best possible extent” (P. Wilson, personal
communication, October 20, 2007). Susan Walsh, the Assistant Superintendent for
Student Services had the following to say about data usage in Small City District W:

I think everyone always looked at data, but I think there is such a focus now
[under NCLB] on the achievement of individual students, of groups of students,
of classrooms, of buildings, of districts. So, the emphasis and the focus on
students’ ability to achieve the benchmarks that have been set forth, that’s big. (S.
Walsh, personal communication, October 12, 2005)

However, she continued by describing the need for change in the teachers’ expectations
regarding the special education students. “Prior to NCLB, I think in years past, the
teachers looked at slow learners and said, Okay, they’re a slow learner and we’ll do
everything we can” (S. Walsh, personal communication, October 12, 2005); but there
wasn’t an emphasis of all students achieving the standards. A major change with NCLB is a sense of responsibility for making sure special education students reach minimum competency too. On the ELA State assessment this means students should score at least a 65 to get a level 3. If the students are not achieving at this level it is up to the district to find out why and determine what can be done to remedy the situation.

To address the issue of low expectations, the district did a few different things. First of all, teachers that were in buildings with a high classification rate were sent to diversity training classes in a neighboring district. This came about as a result of three of the central office administrators attending the same training at a leadership academy. As a result of the feedback from these administrators and the teachers that attended the training out of district, the superintendent decided to contract with JaRa Consulting to bring the training into the district for all the staff members and students. This training was more than an informational session about Black/White issues. It required the teachers and administrators to be introspective about their own biases and stereotypes of various subsets of the population including students of color, students with disabilities, and economically disadvantaged students. The teachers and administrators also examined how stereotypes impacted their expectations of others. By fall of 2005, approximately 120 teachers had been through the training. To make sure the work continued the district formed a Diversity Cadre. This team served as a steering committee for the bias awareness and diversity work within the district. The team consisted of the Assistant Superintendent for Personnel and Administration, the Director of Elementary Education, two principals, a board member, and several teachers from all three levels: elementary, middle school, and high school.
The district office also introduced another training that addressed the issue of stereotypes regarding students in poverty. The goal was to address the academic performance gap between students that were economically disadvantaged and those that were not. A significant gap existed between economically disadvantaged students and those that were not economically disadvantaged (see Table 6). The central office administrators determined that if the teachers in Small City District W were to make a difference in the students’ ELA scores, they had to understand and know how to meet the needs of all of their “customers,” the students. As a result, they sought out training, especially for the teachers in the five Title I buildings. (Title I schools have a higher poverty rate than do non-Title I schools.) In 2004, the Director of Support Programs introduced the district to Ruby Payne’s work on generational poverty. On October 29, 2004, she sent out an internal memo inviting principals and teachers to attend a 3-series workshop on “Understanding Issues of Generational Poverty”.

As closing the achievement gap for our low socioeconomic students is a targeted initiative for our district, we’d like building teams of 3 to participate in the workshop series from our Title I schools…. Many of you have reps on the Diversity Cadre. As this is an initiative the cadre has discussed, you might want to include them… (M. Walsh, personal communication, October 29, 2004.)

All of the district administrators from the curriculum office attended this training along with the principals and their teams. Shortly after, the Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction contracted with Ruby Payne to bring two of her consultants in to train the entire district in November 2005. The plan was to have two sites, one for the elementary and one for secondary. However, before the training could take place, the
Board of Education had the Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction canceled the training because they had some “concerns.”

Finally, in response to the question, “How is what your district doing now different from what you did prior to NCLB?” the Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction responded, “I think the most significant difference is disaggregating that data by subgroups. That’s it. That’s No Child Left Behind and that’s a good thing. That’s the best thing about No Child Left Behind; it forces the issue of looking at disaggregated data…” (F. Wisher, personal communication, October 27, 2005). Wisher believes it is the district administrator’s responsibility for seeing to it that this analysis is done. This leads to another aspect of the customer service theme.

**Effective Leadership**

Through the data analysis, another aspect of the customer service theme that emerged was the importance of effective leadership. One respondent in particular kept making comments distinguishing between “good” leaders and those that were not good. When the Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction was asked, “How has this role changed over the last 3 to 5 years?” her response was, “I don’t think the role has changed at all and I don’t think it should. I think any good assistant superintendent for curriculum has been doing the same things all along” (F. Wisher, personal communication, October 27, 2005). She continued her comments by indicating that her office had “strong instructional leaders.” “We are the leadership for setting everything that comes under the area of curriculum and instruction (F. Wisher, personal communication, October 27, 2005).”
When the Assistant Superintendent joined the district in 2002, she discovered that the district had not adopted any new textbooks in over 5 years. In some curricular areas such as ELA and Social Studies, it had been over 10 years. One of the first things she did was put a curriculum adoption plan in place. Along with updating the curriculum, the Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction provided the teachers with training on the New York State standards. This led to the creation of curriculum maps and benchmarks.

In response to the question, “How much autonomy would principals have in locating assistance?” the superintendent indicated:

You know if there are problems and concerns about the ELA scores, I think they need a certain amount of guidance which hopefully comes from the people that we put in charge of those areas, again referring to the director of elementary education and the assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction. (G. Winger, personal communication, October 28, 2005).

The assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction concurred with what the superintendent indicated. She said, “we provide the leadership for the district to the elementary schools to ensure that the academic program is what it should be, what it can be and [that it] meets the needs of all children.” (F. Wisher, personal communication, October 27, 2005).

Meet the Needs of Individual Students

A recurring theme from all five of the participants from the Small City District W was the desire to “meet the needs of the students.” The contextual information described
the unique needs of each elementary school. The needs were often linked with
demographic features of the students and the school communities in which they attended.
There was recognition on the part of central office that resources needed to be based on
these needs. As a result, Title I buildings received more supports from central office than
did non-Title I buildings. Schools that needed additional resources to implement their
school plans could also get it through central office.

One of the major changes in the district’s response to the labels under NCLB was
a focus on individual students and groups of students. The superintendent was asked,
“What is the district strategy to deal with students who do not meet the State
requirements on the ELA or other benchmarks that the district has established?” His
response was:

There are different things in place; one of them being the AIS programs. Another
area which you know we are weak in is special ed. You know we do offer
resources for those students and I think we make every attempt to work with the
students based on the needs of their IEP and giving them the individual attention
they need to succeed. (G. Winger, personal communication, October 28, 2005)

In response to the question, “How has NCLB redefined the district’s relationship
with elementary schools?” the superintendent responded, “I would say it definitely has
made us take a closer look at the elementary schools. It’s made me focus in on the needs
of the students and the progress that’s going to be needed. (G. Winger, personal
communication, October 28, 2005). The Director of Support Program’s response to this
question was very similar. She said:
I guess the accountability pressure has once again allowed me to focus more. I focus more on our Title I schools because they are under my purview for that. It’s allowed me to really go in and work with teachers and building principals very specifically on trends we’re seeing and perhaps why we’re seeing those trends, and how one might be able to alter instructional strategies to address some of those trends…so making teachers more aware of what they’re doing and assisting them in really focusing on strategies that work, on the need for differentiation of instruction, providing it at the individual level for students’ needs [by] focusing on the students in closing those achievement gaps. (M. Worse, personal communication, October 28, 2005)

*Be a Better Educator*

Small City District W tried to provide timely professional development. For example, to support the adoption of the new textbook series, the district provided ongoing professional development for over 2 years for the principals and teachers. Teachers were taught about the reading series. Principals, on the other hand, were taught what to look for in a literacy lesson. Central office rationalized that the principals would do a better job supervising their staff if they were knowledgeable of the components that make for a successful lesson. In the summers of 2003, 2004, and 2005, the district took all the administrators away to a leadership academy. The focus of the training was ELA, supervision, and data analysis.

Even before NCLB, the district had a Professional Practices Committee (PPC). This team included representation from central office, the teachers’ union, and principals.
The PPC approved the in-house courses that were offered in Small City District W. Before NCLB, student registration for these classes was sent directly to the course instructor. A paper process was in place to track the number of hours accrued. Prior to Fall 2001, teachers could take any classes for a salary increase whether or not it was appropriate for their area of certification. “In service offerings are open to all staff members; however, registrants who fit the target audience will be given preference” (Spring Catalog, personal communication, 2001, p. 2). It was in fall 2001 when the catalog began to reflect a restriction in the classes for which one could receive in-service credit. The following quote was taken from the staff development book: “In addition to specific listings in this booklet, in service credit will be granted for course/workshops directly related to the staff member’s instructional area(s) (p. 1). The length of time required for pre-approval was also changed from “5 business days prior to the event” to “10 business days prior to the event.” However, prior to NCLB in-service course registrations were sent directly to the course instructors to manage. Upon completion of the in-service, the presenter recorded the number of hours each participant was in attendance on their in-service card. Once the participants accumulated 45-contact hours they submitted their in-service cards into the personnel office along with an “Application for Salary Increase” form.

There is documented evidence from spring 2000 and beyond that Small City District W offered ELA-related courses such as—“Woodcock Reading Mastery Test Results/Remediation Techniques”; “The New Standards in ELA –Moving from the Abstract to the Concrete”; “Ultimate Writing Center”; “Working with Junior Great Books (JGB)”; “Matching the NYS Standards to Computer Software”; and “Multisensory
Techniques for All Students”. According to the Small City District W Staff Development In-Service Offerings, credit was awarded for each hour a participant was actually in attendance. In addition to the in-house courses, teachers could take classes from outside providers such as BOCES, the Regional Information Center, the Teachers Center and neighboring colleges and universities.

Even before NCLB, it was tradition in this district to hold Superintendent Conference Days two times per year. Often these days consisted of a combination of district-wide and building-based activities. However, with the change of leadership and the onset of NCLB, the professional development activities for Superintendent’s Conference Days were designed to help the teachers reach the goals as set forth in the district’s professional development plan. The Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction talked about these goals:

The district’s ELA goals are of course from the district level to improve student achievement…. Reading comprehension at the upper elementary grades, where after fourth grade you know sometimes that drifts off. … Aligning the ELA curriculum, differentiated instruction, and closing the achievement gap (F. Wisher, personal communication, October 27, 2005).

As a result of these goals, in 2002, under the leadership of this newly hired Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction the district office began to “control” the management of in-service registration. To facilitate this process, the district purchased a web-based application called, My Learning Plan. Through this system, the Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction controlled the in-service course offerings that the teachers could take. In spring 2006, the teachers began using the
system to track their attendance at conferences too. Each teacher was required to complete a profile in My Learning Plan. Based on this profile the software filtered the course offerings so the only those classes they were eligible to take would appear.

With the advent of NCLB and the district’s move to Comprehensive District Education Planning, the district’s professional development plan became a part of the district’s overall plan and goals. Teachers were now required to specify how the classes they wanted to take fit in with the district’s overall plans. As a result, the Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction took control of the registration process. By 2003, all in-service courses and conferences had to be pre-approved by the Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction. One of the factors motivating the change in the registration procedures may have been the State’s requirement for teachers to take 175 hours of professional development over a 5-year period. The tracking of these hours is facilitated by centrally controlling the registration.

Under NCLB, the district decreased the number of “one-shot” staff development classes. Most classes were a minimum of three sessions allowing the teachers an opportunity to go back and try a skill then come back for more training. The evidence provided by the central office administrators supported the district’s reliance on sustained professional development. For example, from 2002 until the time of the study in 2006, a BOCES content specialist was hired to work in the district as a literacy coach. Under the guidance of the Director of Elementary Education, this literacy coach was placed in the lowest performing elementary schools for an academic school year to work directly with the teachers and students on ELA strategies. All five central office administrators also
provided evidence of the needs-based nature of the professional development the district offered.

*Get More Resources*

Each of the respondents was asked about the challenges they faced in implementing the ELA curriculum and professional development initiatives. Four out of five respondents expressed a need for additional human and financial resources to meet the needs within the district. “The biggest challenge next to what I just stated is that there wasn’t the backing financially to do what we need to do to improve schools overall” (Assistant Superintendent for Pupil Personnel, personal communication, October 12, 2005). The Director of Support Programs, another central office administrator, echoed this sentiment. She indicated there was a “shortage of resources, whether you define that resource as money, or time; anyway you choose to, define it” (M. Worse, personal communication, October 29, 2005). The Superintendent also believed there was a shortage of resources:

Financial resources … are something that we’re always struggling with because of the number of demands that are placed on us by No Child Left Behind. We’re not necessarily getting the support that we need form the federal government or even from the state, so we have to depend a lot on our local taxes. They just seem to be getting higher and higher. (G. Winger, personal communication, October 28, 2005).

However, one outlier, the Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction, believed the district had more than enough resources:
We have what we need to get what we need done… I’m pleased with the amount of federal funding and State funding we get. Now, a lot of people don’t want to hear that because a lot of people think the answer is more money or more staff. I think we’re very adequately staffed. (F. Wisher, personal communication, October 28, 2005).

From 2002-2006, Small City District W expended money from their local school budget and from various federal, state and private grants to improve the students’ ELA achievement. The evidence reinforces the customer-driven philosophy held by the district. Since 2002, the district has also invested in material resources. Small City District W purchased several computers. The computer labs in the 11 elementary schools have been updated to run the Windows XP operating system. The core software package was also upgraded to include ELA-based programs such as Star Early Literacy. In 2004-05, three student computers were purchased for all the Grade 3-5 classes. In spring 2006, the district planned to purchase computers for the K-2 classes. The district administrators also purchased software programs and web-based assessment tools. They purchased SASIxp (a student management system) to track attendance, mobility and other demographic information. FastForword, a brain-based software product was purchased for use with the special education population and the AIS students. During the 2005-06 school year, the district, through a Title IID technology grant project, piloted the Northwest Education Association’s Measures of Academic Progress (NWEA MAP). The AIMS software was bought to track the AIS services provided to the AIS students. This software also generated the mandatory progress reports for the parents. The district also purchased curriculum for use in their summer school program. Summer school was one
of the listed AIS interventions (see Figure 13). To measure the effectiveness of the summer school program, the Director of Support Programs used the Measures of Academic Progress (MAP)’s for pre- and post-tests in ELA.

Paul Wilson, the Assistant Superintendent for Personnel and Administration commented that “we did hire a couple of reading teachers to [put in] the elementary schools, and then shifted some other reading teachers around depending on the need” (P. Wilson, personal communication, October 20, 2005). He went on to explain how important he feels his job is as the first line of defense in making sure that the district hires the best possible staff. “I think that if the kids are going to be successful, then one major determining factor is staff” (P. Wilson, personal communication, October 20, 2005). The Assistant Superintendent for Personnel and Administration indicated that he reviews each applicant’s file prior to sending them to the principals for consideration. Principals then selected their two favorite candidates; however, the final determination was left with the Assistant Superintendent for Personnel and Administration who made the final recommendation to the Superintendent and the Board of Education. According to the Assistant Superintendent for Personnel and Administration, the district also hired three new reading teachers to help meet the ELA needs.

In addition to hiring teachers, Paul Wilson was responsible for overseeing the High Objective Uniform State Standard of Evaluation (HOUSSSE) process for the paraprofessionals and special education teachers in the district. Even before NCLB was signed into law, Small City District W required any teachers, including substitutes, applying for a job, to have a qualified teaching certificate. With the onset of NCLB, the paraprofessionals had to become teaching assistants. For paraprofessionals already in the
district, the HOUSSE process offered various avenues by which they could be deemed “highly qualified” by federal standards.

The requirement for having “highly qualified” staff was also mentioned by the Assistant Superintendent for Student Services. In her interview she said, “This district, I think, has done an excellent job. I feel very comfortable with who we have as teacher assistants now” (S. Walsh, personal communication, October 12, 2005). These teaching assistants have played an essential part in helping the district implement its Academic Interventions Services (AIS). They can provide services directly to students as long as they are under the supervision of a certified teacher. Three of the Title I elementary buildings have reading teaching assistants that work under the supervision of the Reading AIS teachers. Many even help with data entry into the AIMS software management system (the software system used to track the students’ AIS services).

The 2005-06 school year marked the 15th year that Small City District W had Reading Recovery. The district is also a regional Reading Recovery training site. In the period from 2001-2006, the district trained another Reading Recovery teacher leader, and five Reading Recovery teachers. In 2006, 91% of the 35 reading teachers were also Reading Recovery teachers.

*Academic Intervention Services (AIS)*

A major change since the district was labeled in Need of Improvement under NCLB was a focus on the AIS Plan. As part of the planning process for using the AIMS software, the Director of Special Programs helped the AIS teachers articulate their intervention strategies. Now, the AIS services range in type and intensity. The services
range from one-to-one services, such as Reading Recovery, to consultant services with the classroom teacher, and whole class push-in services (see Figure 13).

**Plan**

The Superintendent spoke about the CDEP plan. Although he could not recall the specifics of the plan, he was aware of the process. He knew that one of the goals was focused around improving the ELA scores.

In spring 2000, Small City District W moved from a Shared Decision Model under Commissioner’s Regulation 100.11 to a CDEP model. They faltered in the writing of the plan on their first attempt. The district relied on the buildings to provide the content of the first CDEP plan. In essence, they tried to fit the old planning model over the new. The State Education department returned the plan to the district marked unacceptable along with some recommended changes.

In 2002, a change in leadership at the district level resulted in a change in the planning “process.” The Assistant Superintendent for Instruction and Development assumed responsibility for making sure the Comprehensive District Educational Planning (CDEP) document was a viable plan. In 2002, her first year in the district, she requested consultant support from the area BOCES. The BOCES team trained the CDEP committee on the use of data, goal setting, and so forth. CDEP incorporated all of the plans: the professional development plan, the Academic Intervention Services (AIS) plan, the technology plan, and the Comprehensive System of Personnel Development (CSPD) plan. The process was still followed at the time of this study in 2006.
AIMS 3.0 release

Subject – CODE Syntax

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Gr</th>
<th>Interv.</th>
<th>Intensity</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ES</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.3</td>
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Level
ES – Elementary School
MS – Middle School
HS – High School

Subject Codes:
1 English
2 math
3 science – need to create specific interventions
4 social studies – need to create specific interventions

Intensity Code
1. High
2. Medium
3. Low

AIMS Literacy-Based Intervention Codes:
1. Reading
2. One-to-One (Medium & High)
3. Small Group Pull Out – (Medium & High)
4. Small Group Push In – (Medium & High)
5. Reading Readiness Program – (Medium)
6. Collaborative Teaching (Low, Medium & High)
7. Extended School Day (Low, Medium & High)
8. Enhanced Classroom Environment/Learning Opportunities (Low & Med)
9. Reading Tutorial (M)
10. Summer School (H)
11. Technology Enhanced Tutoring (M & H)

Progress Levels
0 = No progress / or didn’t attend
1 = Emerging
2 = Developing
3 = Satisfactory

Figure 13. District developed AIS intervention codes.
The Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction, Fran Wisher, referred to their planning as “systematic leadership”:

We have our overarching district goals, which include our AIS program and our professional development goals and now include our special education CSPD plan. And, this is conveyed to the building, so when they put together their school improvement plans they’re not putting together their school improvement plan in a vacuum. They have their parameters. When they put together their school improvement plans they need to have measurable goals for ELA, for math, and the other thing that’s our comprehensive focus. Our other district goal is character education; so each school improvement plan also includes character education goals. People feel like they’re supported. They recognize that as we set these goals and they set their building goals their professional development needs will be met through that vehicle. As buildings put together their school improvement plans if they need resources, time, money, whatever to attain some of their goals, they can access some of our federal funding for that. (F. Wisher, personal communication, October 27, 2005)

All five administrators interviewed talked about the collaborative nature of the planning that took place in the district. The Director of Support Programs, Mary Worse, made the claim:

The district committees that I either sit on now or one time chaired… constantly have community representation. I have community advisory boards that I work with. For example, I have a community advisory board for our after school grants and for our Title I grants. And they’re representatives from [the] various
community agencies so the Y-M [YMCA], Cornell Cooperative, Y-W [YWCA]. … Most of our district committees have community representation whether it’s CDEP, whether it’s PDP [the] professional development committee, whether it’s AIS committee. There [are] so many different committees. All of them have community representation. (M. Worse, personal communication, October 29, 2005)

Beginning in the 2002-03 school years, the Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction began holding joint planning meetings once per month with the curriculum office and the special education office. At the time of this study the collaborative planning was still in place. This was a radical change from the way things were prior to NCLB. The Director of Support Programs, who returned in 2001, commented on the difference in the relationship between the special education office and the curriculum office:

When I first came back to the district at the time there was a clear divide between special ed and regular ed; special ed was here and regular ed was here, and there wasn’t an integration and support on a curricular line….That’s been a very blatant change that’s taken place and a conscious change of trying to integrate the two [special education and regular education]. And it’s happened for a number of reasons—some of them have come because of federal legislation requirements, where special ed teachers are also held to the professional qualification standards and because of the requirements and disaggregation of subgroups (students with disabilities). There is an expectation requirement that they perform academically on parallel, if you will, with regular ed students. So, [there is a] need to really
have a seamless integration of regular and special ed so that they can support each other. (M. Worse, personal communication, October 29, 2005)

The Assistant Superintendent for Student Services also mentioned the collaborative planning in her interview:

Now we sit at the table at every meeting and there [are] joint conversations, which you know, I’m very proud of that. It needs to continue. We need to do it even more... Then we come full circle and everyone’s aware of the issues and challenges for special education. And on the flip side, special education is also aware of the challenges that general education is facing, not hearing about it, you know, as an afterthought. In planning we’re all right there together, so, that is just incredible that we’re able to say, “We need to come together on this. This is a challenge we all face. These are requirements that you know, we need to work with as a joint effort or we’re not going to achieve where we need to be.” (S. Walsh, personal communication, October 12, 2005)

In Small City District W, as part of the plan, elementary schools that failed to meet AYP were assigned a central office staff member from the curriculum office. This action was taken in direct response to NCLB. The central office administrator became a member of the school’s Building Leadership Team. Their role was to advise the team and assist them in writing the Local Assistance Plan (LAP). This plan was a document required by the state when a school failed to meet AYP. It required the district to show that they have used root cause analysis to determine the issues within the school. Part of the LAP required the district officials to document how they were going to support the school in order for them to make improvement in the particular core subject area, in this
case, English Language Arts. In District W, this support came through the assignment of a Literacy Coach, staff development opportunities, purchase of software, an increase in AIS reading support, and the training of teachers in Reading Recovery to name a few things.

The Assistant Superintendent for Personnel and Administration, Paul Wilson, spoke about the collaborative nature of the building-based teams on which a central office administrator would serve if it was one of the schools that did not make AYP:

Every building in the district has a team…of people representing every aspect of the building. So, you might have people on the team from specific grade levels, someone representing special ed, someone representing the other core subjects: art, music, phys ed, etc. There is a representative from administration and there’s a representative from the community (usually the PTA or some other parent) to get ideas from someone who’s not in the school building. (P. Wilson, personal communication, October 20, 2005)

*Relationship with the State Education Department.* The majority of the plans written by the district are mandated by the State Education Department. One of the questions the researcher asked during the interviews touched on the relationship the district had with the State Education Department. Three of the five administrators indicated that the relationship was very good. In each case, the individuals had direct contact with the State Ed officials. In describing her relationship with the State Ed Department, Susan Walsh, Assistant Superintendent for Student Services expressed the following:
We just recently went through a Quality Assurance Review with the State Ed Department. I have always had an excellent relationship [with the State]. My approach has always been, when you have these kinds of reviews, is that it’s a … way to look at are we on the right track. Are we, as a district, doing everything we can to provide the best services for students in whatever category they’re in? When we have the state come in and do a review, for me it’s an ability then, to say, “yes you’re absolutely on the right track” or “you’re not.” And if you’re not, then what do we need to do adjust it to be in line with their [the State’s] requirement, you know regulations. … I’ve worked hard on that relationship with our State Ed department. There’s a trust that has been developed over the years…

(S. Walsh, personal communication, October 12, 2005)

The Director of Support Program also commented on the relationship with the State Ed department. “From my perspective it’s very good; but you have to understand that I spend at least one day a week at State Ed. I happen to sit on an advisory board for Commissioner Mills” (M. Worse, personal communication, October 29, 2005). She went on to say that “they’ve had a very supportive relationship with us and I also see that they have a relationship with the Special Ed department too.”

It appeared that the district used the State and NCLB policy to its advantage to try to foster change within the district. For example, they used the standards and the way the State Education Department reports the test scores as a rationale for converting the old grading system to a “standards-based” system (see Appendix G). In 2003, the Director of Elementary Education began work with the teachers on a standards-based report card. In 2004-05, the district piloted the report card in third grade. During the 2005-06 school
years the report card was modified for use with Grades 1-4. This forced the teachers to provide more specific information regarding the students’ ELA progress.

Summary of Small City District W Findings

The actions taken by Small City School District W were focused and measurable. They increased the level of accountability for all stakeholders. Central Office administrators in this district believed in systemic leadership. They believed that the role of central office administrators was to provide good customer service. In many ways, it was a departure of what happened in the district prior to the implementation of NCLB. Planning processes were changed. The movement to a CDEP model from a shared decision making model under Commissioners Regulations 100.11 helped the entire district focus on three specific goals, one of which was improving ELA performance at the elementary level. Central office administrators from the curriculum office and the special education department began meeting monthly to ensure that special education teachers were held accountable for teaching grade-specific content. There was a conscious effort to make sure regular education and special education teachers were clear on the district’s expectation in terms of their literacy curriculum and instruction.

This qualitative study answered the following questions:

1. How did central office administrators try to improve the students’ English Language Arts (ELA) achievement prior to No Child Left Behind (NCLB)?

In Small City District W, the only disaggregated data that was examined were the results from the students with disabilities and economically disadvantaged students. It also appeared that the bulk of the responsibility rested with the building principals.
Evidence from previous plans showed that the district plans were generated from the individual building plans. The plans appeared to be a compilation of the plans from each elementary school. Information came from the school level to the district rather than from the district to the school.

During the time leading up to the implementation of NCLB, there was considerable turn-over in the central office staff. According to the Director of Support Programs, this began to change during the 2001-02 school year. Since NCLB, the central office, especially in the curriculum office, has stabilized. The only changes have been the addition of administrative staff.

Prior to NCLB, if students with disabilities failed to make progress, the fault was placed on the child’s disability. There was no attention to the curriculum that they were given. Three of the five administrators in this district commented that the special education department had little interaction with the regular education department prior to NCLB. Most special education students were not given the grade-appropriate texts because teachers thought the material was too hard for them.

The district started a summer school program in August 2001. However, there was no designated curriculum. Teachers were allowed to select materials that they thought were appropriate. In addition, the teachers were hired based on seniority rather than certification area and experience with the subject matter.

2. How are the central office administrators responding to their districts being labeled in need of improvement in ELA under NCLB?

In the words of the Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction, the major task was to be a “stress buster.” Change is often difficult
for people to handle. The public scrutiny of the test scores caused additional stress for many of the staff. This was compounded by the media which only focused on deficits and not the strides that the district had made in their news reporting.

Central office administrators were expected to be instructional leaders, providing advice and guidance to principals and teachers in regards to ELA instruction. The amount of support provided to the principals depended on the principal’s leadership ability and the needs of the students. Great attention was given to the unique needs of each elementary school.

Using collaborative planning, the CDEP team, chaired by the Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction, wrote the overarching district goals. Principals and their staffs were then responsible for aligning their building-level plans with the comprehensive district education plan. This encompassed professional development, the technology plan, the AIS plan and the CSPD. This was a major change for the district.

A new textbook was adopted K-3 to bring a common curriculum to all 11 elementary schools. This was a “non-negotiable” item. Teachers were expected to follow the scope and sequence provided with the adopted textbook series. To hold the teachers accountable, the district collected assessment pieces from the program throughout the school year. The professional development associated with the textbook adoption was provided during the school day to make sure all teachers were exposed to the necessary information. The district also provided a district-wide literacy position statement to provide guidance to the teachers. This
was a major change from the last time the district had an ELA textbook adoption.

In the 1990s when the last adoption occurred, no training was provided for the teachers or principals.

3. Why did the central office administrators institute the corrective actions chosen?

Many curriculum projects were undertaken. According to the district administrators, in light of their mobility rate, consistency of educational program was very important. When asked why they had chosen specific programs such as FastForword or NWEA MAP program, the reason was always because of the data. All of the new programs were chosen because they were data driven. Any new instructional strategies were based on best practices. After NCLB, the district began to examine the effectiveness of existing programs and interventions, such as their summer school program and Reading Recovery. This was in part because of the district’s interpretation of “scientifically-based practices” under NCLB.

The district implemented a standards-based report card in hopes that the teachers would teach to the standards and that the grades they give would reflect what the students would get on the state assessments. In 2006, at the time of the study the district was in its first full-year of implementation of the standards-based report cards for Grades 1-4.

4. How have the corrective actions implemented by central office impacted the elementary English Language Arts achievement on the State assessment?

The ELA results continue to improve. As a result of the February 2005 results, the district was allowed to stay as a District in Need of Improvement Year I rather than move to a District in Need of Improvement Year 2. Seventy-four percent (74%, \( n = 558 \)) of the fourth grade students scored level 3 or 4 as compared to the State with only seventy
percent (70%) of all fourth graders scoring a level 3 or 4. All of the subgroups, including special education, made the necessary progress on the state assessment (Table 6). If all subgroups within the district make AYP or the effective AMO in 2006 the district will be removed from the list.
Case 2: Small Rural District T

The Problem

In Small Rural District T, only one elementary school takes the State assessments. The district is held accountable for three subgroups: Whites, students with disabilities (SWD), and economically disadvantaged students. In 2002, the district was identified in need of improvement in elementary ELA. As a result, of the 2002-03 test scores the district was given the label, “District in Need of Improvement (DINI).” In 2003-04, this local educational agency became a District in Need of Improvement Year 2. The superintendent confirmed that the district was “tagged” because of the special education population. In addition, there was a large special education population in the district. The superintendent indicated that approximately 18% of the students had Individual Education Plans (IEPs). This classification rate was higher than the state average of 12%.

Small Rural District T met the 95% testing requirement. The total population and all the other student subgroups: Whites and students eligible for free or reduced lunch also met AYP. However, the data showed that a gap still existed between economically disadvantaged students and those that were not economically disadvantaged. There was also a gap between the students with disabilities and the general education student population. The district was also warned that their “general ed students are flat lining and not moving.” The following tables show the test scores from Small Rural District T.
Table 9

*District T Mean Scores Compared to the State*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1998-99</th>
<th>1999-00</th>
<th>2000-01</th>
<th>2001-02</th>
<th>DINI-1</th>
<th>DINI – 1</th>
<th>Good</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>District T Total</td>
<td>641</td>
<td>651</td>
<td>640</td>
<td>652</td>
<td>651</td>
<td>648</td>
<td>647</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Similar Schools</td>
<td>644</td>
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<td>654</td>
<td>655</td>
<td>655</td>
<td>651</td>
<td>659</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>653</td>
<td>653</td>
<td>659</td>
<td>660</td>
<td>656</td>
<td>available</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 10
*Percentage of 3s and 4s by Gap Groups in District T*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Small Rural District T</th>
<th>2000-01</th>
<th>2001-02</th>
<th>2002-03</th>
<th>2003-04</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>DINI – 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Population</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>146</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>197</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>137</td>
<td>187</td>
<td>138</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General-ed</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>152</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special-ed</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>29</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Econ. Disadvantaged</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>68</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>77</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Disadvantaged</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>74</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>68</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York State</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>215,037</td>
<td>212,820</td>
<td>211,313</td>
<td>211,313</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Figure 14.** Axial coding leading to selective coding - Small Rural District T.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>Contextual</th>
<th>NCLB</th>
<th>Curriculum, Instruction &amp; Assessments</th>
<th>Planning Processes</th>
<th>Data Use</th>
<th>Resource Allocation</th>
<th>Professional Development</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Superintendent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director of Instruction &amp; Staff Development</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director of Special Programs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Resource</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

X indicates theme was discussed or implied in the interview
Theory Building

Using the three-pronged grounded theory approach (open coding, axial coding and selective coding); the researcher pored over the interviews, artifacts and documents collected from Small Rural District T. Some of this process was revealed in Chapter 3 (see Figure 6, Figure 7, Figure 8 and Figure 9). Figure 14 shows further analysis of the data into axial and selective codes. It reports the findings by respondent. The following narrative highlights important selective codes or themes that emerged from the data.

Let’s Put it in Context

In Small Rural District T, one of the major efforts undertaken in the district to increase the students ELA achievement was improvement in the climate and a refocus of the district’s priorities. Between 2001 and 2005, the district suffered many losses. As a result of the actions taken by the previous superintendent, the trust between central office and the rest of the district was eroded. During this time there was also turnover amongst the administrators and teachers. Finally, in spring 2004 the Board of Education bought out the previous superintendent’s contract. That same year the community voted down the budget resulting in the district operating on a contingency budget. In October 2005, when the current superintendent was interviewed for this study, he had only been in the district for 3 months. His major objective was to “repair [the] damage to the systems.” He believed “the focus was taken off a lot of the educational issues worrying about a contingency budget. A lot of bad things happened to a [lot of] good people” (T. Thomas, personal communication, October 13, 2005).
It’s All About the Data

In Small Rural District T, the pendulum in terms of data use swung from one side to the other. Dr. Teveland, the superintendent that was in the position from 1981 to 2001, was “a data man.” However, his immediate successor was not “much of a data person” (R. Tree, personal communications, October 14, 2005). In 2005, with Tom Thomas and the rest of the newly hired administration, the pendulum swung back to a focus on data usage. “[NCLB] does make you look at data a little more closely on specific groups of kids that you may not have” (T. Thomas, personal communication, October 13, 2005).

Now, according to the Director of Special Programs:

We try to do everything through a database decision-making model. We’re constantly looking at our data trying to be more efficient as to how we collect the data, [and] how we present it to teachers…. We do item analysis on the test, to see what the problem is. Is it just … one kid or is it a bunch of kids that we forgot to teach something to? … [The] data, it tells me a lot. So, for our new superintendent we’re collecting more and more data now than we’ve ever done before. … Looking at the data I’ve just recently put together [a report] from K-12. A large majority of our students are classified LD [learning disabled] in the reading area…. A large amount [of students are classified for] reading, decoding and reading comprehension. (K. Trever, personal communication, November 2, 2005)

During her interview, the Director of Instruction and Staff Development mentioned that the district conducted root cause analysis. This analysis was accomplished a couple of different ways. The LINKS team conducted root cause
analysis for the district. This is the team responsible for a collaborative planning process similar to CDEP. Through this planning process they “link” all the required reports together. Often times the district administrators and principals do “some preliminary work” with the data “to identify the root causes that [they] can control.” The Director of Instruction and Staff Development explained that they conducted root cause analysis to refocus the educators on the task at hand and to get them to stop using excuses for the students not being successful:

You know, people want to go back to parents and kids [and] blame [the] parents and kids. We try to stop the process before that happens and say, “What are the reasons? How do you know these might be the reasons? What data can we collect to either verify this hunch or nullify it?” That’s how we start to search for what’s causing this, and [we look for] a lot of correlation. If we get this do we get this? Does this correlate with that? (R. Tree, personal communication, October 14, 2005)

Let’s Get Focused - Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessments

In 2002, the district formed an ELA subcommittee. They conducted an internal audit of the ELA instruction provided in Small Rural District T. As a result, William Teddy the former superintendent invited in the area BOCES to conduct an external audit. The findings were captured in a report entitled, “Literacy Audit Process [Small Rural District T]: External Review Report.” In the introduction of the report it stated:

The willingness of the district to invite a group of “critical friends” through its doors speaks volumes about its commitment to continuous improvement. … An
external review of the K-8 Literacy program was conducted at [Small Rural
District T] on May 19 and 20, 2003. [W. Teddy], Superintendent of schools,
requested that the review be conducted in response to the Literacy Audit Guided-
Self Study completed in the months prior to the External Review. The goal was
to provide an objective assessment of the K-8 literacy program that validated the
findings of the Guided Self-Study Team.

As part of this review the team wrote down their findings and conclusions. The
following excerpt is a copy of the findings and conclusions taken directly from the
External Audit:

1. There is not a consistent level of high quality instruction taking place. A
   variety of strategies are being employed in pockets of places with varying
degrees of success. A common philosophy was not apparent. The district
must develop a common understanding of the literacy attributes among all
staff members, in all subject areas, in order to provide a more rigorous and
challenging curriculum that will meet the needs of our learners. (p. 3, 159)

2. Staff members must use data for both student improvement and program
   review. (pp. 3, 198)

3. A variety of reading strategies are being used in a variety of places. A
   consistent approach needs to be developed. A determination of required
   strategies at each grade level must be developed and expected. (p. 3)

4. In order for us to determine how good is good enough for our students,
   benchmark assessments need to be developed in Grades 4-8. (pp. 3, 198)
5. As some of our learners are not successful, we need to develop a pyramid of interventions that will ensure success of all. (p. 3)

6. Numerous models of parallel tasks need to be distributed and used on a daily basis.

7. A balanced literacy program should be defined and expected. (p. 159)

8. Writing expectations need to be developed and used in all subject areas. The quality, variety, length and number of written pieces should be addressed. The writing process and timed writing process should be defined. (p. 159)

9. Books taught at each grade level 3-6 should be identified and not duplicated. (p. 159)

10. Grade level expectations and benchmark assessments should be developed. (p. 159)

11. All classrooms should be literacy rich with a variety of texts beyond textbooks and books. (p. 159)

12. Consistent portfolio pieces should be identified.

13. A district-wide approach to vocabulary development should be developed.

14. Differentiated instruction needs to be implemented. (p. 159)

15. There are relatively few clear expectations for our teaching staff in terms of materials to be used, benchmarks for student growth, strategies to be employed, or specific work to be completed by students. There is a tremendous amount of work going on, but it lacks focus and alignment between buildings. District standards and expectations have not been
identified and communicated to all teachers, in all grade levels, and in all subject areas. This work is a critical next step. (p. 197)

16. The district needs to continue to use data to identify skills, strategies, and services needed for students. (p. 198)

17. We need to continue our data analysis, as was previously done in 8th grade with our 4th grade data. (p. 198)

18. We need to acknowledge changes in the area of Special Education on the State ELA assessments and determine potential impact.

19. Students need to use data to improve performance. (p. 198)

The review team notes that these findings and recommendations were themselves spread over the self-study document, and that they represent a wide range of topics and specificity. But taken as a whole, they point to the need for the following:

1. A clear, simple, yet comprehensive set of literacy expectations for all students, K-8 (better still, K-12).

2. A set of ‘non-negotiable’ instructional contributions by all teachers, that are deemed best practices to assure that all students meet the expectations (These contributions should include the teaching of literacy strategies, as well as providing appropriate experiences for students).

3. Instruction support (using pyramid of services model) that is targeted to students’ needs, relative to the literacy expectations.
4. A set of assessments (as economical as possible, embedded in instruction wherever practicable) that keep track of students’ progress toward each of the literacy expectations.

5. Reporting to parents on students’ progress toward each of the literacy expectations.

6. Analyzing literacy data to inform instruction and instructional support, as well as professional development.

Through central office’s research into what was going on with the students with disabilities, the Director of Instruction & Staff Development remarked: “Most of our kids are not having access to the curriculum, so you can’t expect them to achieve if they are baking muffins all day.” The Director of Special Programs, indicated that in this district, A large majority of [their] students are classified LD [learning disabled] in the reading area. I mean, they have other LD areas too. It may be math and reading … but there’s a large, large amount reading, decoding and reading comprehension. (K. Trever, personal communication, November 2, 2005)

In response to the question, “What has your district done differently to address the issue?” the Director of Special Programs informed the researcher of a structural change: [T]his role has definitely changed in this district just in the last year. Prior to me, no one in this office has ever observed teaching assistants, aids or teachers, but the building principals would do that. You know, not that they’re not qualified to do that, but I don’t believe they really know special ed well enough to know exactly what they’re looking for in a co-teaching environment; or you know, skills that teachers should have for a special needs child, skills … a teaching
assistance should have…but that role has changed. I’ve taken on those responsibilities, which I do like anyway. I prefer to observe my own teachers and aids and I even do related service people because they push into the classroom… So, that part has changed. The role of facilitating CSE meetings definitely has changed in this district. The past administrator here, or director, excuse me, didn’t go to each and every CSE meeting. She had psychologist running the meetings. I go to them all. (K. Trever, personal communication, November 2, 2005.

In October 2005, the superintendent had their ELA committee conduct another internal review to gauge the district’s progress towards achieving the previously stated recommendations (see Appendix H). In summary, the district has made some changes.

*We’re All in this Together*

In Small Rural District T, if you are a principal in a school in need of improvement, the Director of Instruction & Staff Development would personally work with you and your staff. In her own words:

You and I would be connected at the hip. I work very closely with the principals; almost every instructional decision is made jointly. They very much understand that whatever decision is made in one building ripples through the rest of the system. (R. Tree, personal communication, October 14, 2005)

The district was committed to using early intervention strategies with the students. They believe that “catching them early is the best.” The Director of Instruction and Staff Development indicated they’ve “done a lot of work and put a lot of our eggs in the basket.
at the primary level at this point” (R. Tree, personal communication, October 14, 2005).

The district:

“brought in a reading program to put more emphasis on reading. [Small Rural District T] children, like a lot of children in the state of New York, [have the] ability to read as well, and we know that. So, we’re trying to catch them when they’re younger by bringing in more reading, by bringing in more related services: Speech, Occupational Therapy, [and] Physical Therapy, at [the] preschool level… We also have our Bridging Program… We do … 9-days in the summer for incoming kindergarteners, and a lot of assessment is done with them in those 9 days so their teachers no exactly where they are. (R. Tree, personal communication, October 14, 2005)

This is an example of the way in which central office administrators in Small Rural District T made structural changes that placed more emphasis on reading instruction. In addition, the Director of Special Programs mentioned that the district has the Wilson Program, Reading Recovery Program ¹, running records, and DIBELS in the primary school. However, she acknowledged that there “might be more that they use with the regular ed kids”, but those are basically [what] … they use with special needs children.”

In Small Rural District T, the decision about which curriculum is used at each grade level is “a decision that happens between the teachers, the principals and [the Director of Instruction & Staff Development].” The regular education students use Scholastic Literacy Place. In the primary school (K-3) they use the guided reading format … In terms of [grades] 4-6 they do have the Scholastic Literacy Place, but the

¹ This program was dropped in 2004 when the area BOCES stopped offering support for the program.
Director of Instruction and Staff Development was not sure if the teachers were utilizing guided reading or a balanced literacy approach. In her words the reading instruction:

It’s all over the place. On paper there are blueprints that are really curriculum maps for each grade level. They were written several years ago and then revised. The whole district … launched UBD (Understanding by Design) and they were rewriting their maps based on that concept. Most of the maps were redone but not all of them. For every grade level the outcomes are defined; what students are supposed to know and be able to do. (R. Tree, personal communication, October 14, 2005)

The Director of Instruction and Staff Development indicated that the basis for the ELA mapping was the New York State standards. However, since District T initially wrote the maps the State Education Department released a new core curriculum in which they separated the performance indicators by grade level. As a result the district will “need to go back and check [their] maps to make sure they’re still in alignment.” The State did not have performance indicators for Grades 4-8 before. “They’re [State Education Department] going to take them [the performance indicators] all the way through to twelfth grade eventually; so we need to make sure those [are incorporated]. That’s work that will be done this year” (R. Tree, personal communication, October 14, 2005).

The Director of Instruction and Staff Development explained that the process for curriculum selection:

can start at any level when a question is raised or the data has brought to light something that’s not working. So, it could be the principal saying the building isn’t producing the results I want, so we need to reexamine this; or, it could be the
teachers saying it’s not doing what we need. At that point, they will bring it to IAC [Instructional Advisory Council]— their questions, their concerns—and that council will start to do some research and ask them to produce data one way or the other, supporting their proposal, or telling or supporting the fact that what they’re using is not working. And then, we’ll ask them [for] recommendations [of] where they would like to move to the LINKS team. The entire district team goes to the Board. It’s [the LINKS team] a mixture of teachers. (R. Tree, personal communication, October 14, 2005)

Professional Development

The district administrators also approached their professional development in light of their changing context. As a result of the closure of several businesses, the district’s clientele changed from white collar workers to an increasing blue collar population. With this new context came a need to give the teachers “the training they need to be able to deal with the population that [they] have” (K. Trever, personal communication, November 2, 2005). The district experienced an increase in the number of students from economically disadvantaged homes. The teachers were not prepared to meet the needs of these students.

They’re used to the kid that they can stand in the classroom and they can lecture and the kids would get it. Well, it doesn’t work that way now. We don’t have that clientele. (K. Trever, personal communication, November 2, 2005)

Consequently, the teachers had to deal with some new issues. To address these issues, the Director of Special Programs and the Director of Instruction and Staff Development
decided to provide training to the staff on “Understanding Generational Poverty.” This is the work of Ruby Payne. The Director of Special Programs began training the new teachers in August 2005. She explained that each summer all of the teachers in the district attend a week-long staff development right before the school year starts.

The Professional Development Council, their task is to work with the mentoring program, the APPR, [and] the Professional Development plan. We do have a week long pre-service for all the teachers in the district…in August. They [the PDC] are in charge. Looking at portfolio for initial certificates, they’ll devise the plan for that and then keeping track of the 175 hours that starts up for those people. They’re in charge of that. And I have an instructional advisory council (IAC) and they’re in charge of AIS, the writing and the monitoring of curriculum, the instructional strategies and researching instructional strategies for the district, assessments, material selection and course offerings, program offerings. (R. Tree, personal communication, October 14, 2005)

The Director of Instruction & Staff Development is an integral part of the professional development that takes place within Small Rural District T.

Prior to my coming here they had gone through a process of establishing their professional development priorities. And they identified, I think there are 8 or 9 practices that they want in place in the district: cooperative learning, differentiated instruction, critical thinking, and reading in the content areas. These are some of the things they decided; so, most of my professional development focuses around those nine areas. (R. Tree, personal communication, October 14, 2005)
In response to the question about how the district supports principals and teachers in schools that were in need of improvement, the Director of Special Programs talked about the staff development that the district provides:

Well, they offer you workshops, subscriptions to magazines to help you—like educational magazines, things like that. They’ll give you time if you need time … to go to class…—a couple of days off, or something like that. They’ll work with you anyway they can. Lots of in-services; Rene [Director of Instruction & Staff Development] does a lot of that with us. In fact, we’re just starting to work on observations; how they can be done more effectively and what are we really looking for so we’re working on the same page. (R. Trever, personal communication, November 2, 2005)

[In terms of the teachers] we’re always offering them workshops, in-service, teachers’ day, in-service days. We’re always doing that. Matter of fact, this is the first year we’re actually starting to offer it [staff development] also to our teaching assistants and aids; cause you know we always want them to do the job but without giving the training, and that’s hurting our kids. And we know that so, we’re definitely making that change. I think one of the major strategies is to give the teachers the training they need to be able to deal with the population that we have, number one, and understanding of the test and what it is that they’re trying to test our kids on. You know we always want our teachers to give the tests but we don’t always give an explanation of what it’s all about; or we just give a few. We hope that that turns over…but it doesn’t always turnkey over the way you want it to. So, we’re bringing everyone in. I mean, we’ve got the teaching
assistants in there. We’ve got the teachers, the reading teachers, the psychologists. They’re all coming to these in-services now to understand what the tests are all about. So, nobody’s in the dark as to what we’re attempting to do. They’re here for a whole week in the summer, so, we do various things. (K. Trever, personal communication, November 2, 2005)

According to Trever, the primary “external providers” of assistance to help the elementary schools improve their instruction in ELA are “Rene Tree, myself, and Sam Topich.” Each of the “external providers” mentioned were district-level administrators: the Director of Instruction & Staff Development, the Director of Special Programs, and the Director of Technology.

Resource Allocation

For the purposes of this study, resource allocation refers to the use of funding, materials and people to achieve a desired goal. Small Rural District T was committed to hiring the best teachers. When asked what the district’s role was in supporting the elementary schools, the Director of Instruction and Staff Development answered:

The district’s role is to hire teachers that are qualified, not only qualified, but have personal relationships with children. I can have a person that is highly qualified, you know, on paper, but have a lousy disposition when it comes to kids. It is our responsibility to be sure that our kids are safe; that [we hire] somebody that cares about them and can have a relationship with them so that they feel safe and secure. You can’t teach kids if they don’t feel that way. Trust is a factor. So, that’s our responsibility. (R. Tree, personal communication, October 14, 2005)
The researcher inquired if the district had made any software purchases for use with the students. The Director of Special Programs answered, “we are not technologically inclined” (K. Trever, personal communication, November 2, 2005). They did, however, purchase a different student management system. Small Rural District T went from the Pentamation student management system to eSchool Plus. Trever indicated the switch to eSchool Plus was made because the local BOCES was using the software. As a result, the BOCES could generate more comparative charts and tables on the State assessments. “Part of the change [to eSchool Plus] was driven by New York State moving to the unique identifier system and their data warehouse. eSchool Plus is more compatible with that system…” (R. Tree, personal communication, October 14, 2005). The final reason for choosing this application is that there is a web-based component. Small Rural District T hopes to give parents web-based access to their child’s attendance, grades and so on during the 2006-07 school years.

The researcher also asked the Director of Special Programs, “What are the challenges in meeting the goals that you have set for your students in the district?”

Our first challenge is to be able to get them to read at least on grade level so they can be successful in that area. That’s the biggest challenge, at least for our kids. The second challenge is to be able to use the money we have for the teachers so they can have the time to teach effectively and the resources. You know without having unlimited books and chairs and all the other good stuff that we need, we’re lacking. To me, those are the two big challenges that we have, that I can see. You know, talking about NCLB and you get money for this, we got money for that, but yet, we don’t see a whole … lot. Matter of fact, our Title I was cut this year. To
try to compensate for the [lack of funding from State Ed] we have tried, you know, to raise taxes, but, that’s not too cool. They don’t really like that but, we were on a contingency budget. There wasn’t much we could do there. We tried to get involved with grants. We write them but we’re not able to get the big ones. They usually go to the five big cities [New York, Yonkers, Syracuse, Rochester, and Buffalo]. And we try to do what we can do, I mean considering the lack of, you know, money. I’m sure you know people that say the more money you get the more you want. Well, that may be true, but speaking for special ed alone, this is a constant expenditure right here. I mean one year we could have kids that are just, you know, LD children, no big deal. Then we get high cost kids… I mean, we have several high cost children. (K. Trever, personal communication, November 2, 2005)

Let’s Make a Plan

The current administrative staff found that the plans were lacking in detail and substance.

I came in looking for the [AIS] plan and I was presented with, I don’t know, it’s only a couple of pages long. So, I said, “This has to go. This is absolutely unusable and we have to start again.” And that’s what we’re doing. We’re starting over. (R. Tree, personal communication, October 14, 2005)

Since the current central office administrators arrived in the district they have worked with the Regional Support Service Center (RSSC) to improve the written documents. The
Director of Instruction & Staff Development created two advisory councils: professional development council (PDC) and instruction advisory council (IAC):

The Professional Development Council, their task is to work with the mentoring program, the APPR, the Professional Development Plan. … When I came on board, the superintendent charged me with pulling that [AIS plan] together. So when I put this advisory council together, we studied the regulations and we looked at putting together a district-wide system. “Whatever you do in this building is fine as long as you have these components and it can transfer across. So, you know you have to have a way of identifying students using multiple measures. You must have a way of identifying their gaps. You must have a way of identifying research based interventions. How will you provide those? How will you keep track of those successes or those interventions, and how will you exit students? And then what’s your documentation system for that?” So, right now we’re in the process of rebuilding coming into alignment with those principles because they were doing something different at every building. (R. Tree, personal communication, October 14, 2005)

Small Rural District T used LINKS, which is very similar to CDEP. It is also a “comprehensive education planning model.” Their BOCES created this comprehensive elementary strategic planning model. “And then they created a high school one and then they linked them together [to] make a K-12 comprehensive planning model. [Planning] starts with data, looks at root causes and tries to close the gaps wherever needed” (R. Tree, personal communications). That is what the district uses to determine where they need to work.
Summary of Small Rural District T Findings

Central Office administrators in Small Rural District T worked hard to mend relationships and re-establish trust within their district. They put structures in place to bring about the necessary changes. They arranged regular meeting times, created committees and worked with the RSSC “through an intensive process of data review, root cause analysis, and planning” (R. Tree, personal communication, December 9, 2005).

This qualitative study answered the following questions:

1. How did central office administrators try to improve the students’ English Language Arts (ELA) achievement prior to No Child Left Behind (NCLB)?

   The district office did not appear to coordinate any of the services or programs between the buildings. Perhaps this was because there was only one primary school and one intermediate school. Decisions appeared to be based at the school level. Prior to NCLB, the administrators involved with this study indicated that the superintendent that was in the district until 2001 was a “data man.” Each building decided which curricular program they wanted to implement in each grade. The district also had an elementary summer school program. Students were invited to summer school based on teacher recommendations. Finally, the district had Reading Recovery in the district prior to NCLB.

2. How are central office administrators responding to their districts being labeled in need of improvement in ELA under No Child Left Behind (NCLB)?

   The district tried to address the ELA problems by giving attention to the school climate, focus on data, root cause analysis and planning. The district also tried to identify students early in their school experience, and then provide the necessary interventions.
The district believed in early interventions. They improved communication by creating a district newsletter, updating their website and establishing regular meetings that involved the staff in district-wide planning teams, and by refocusing the district’s attention on teaching the students. Central office also required the use of the data to justify program choices and hunches about student performance.

District administrators met with the buildings principals twice a month. As a team, central office helped the teachers and principals look more closely at the results. They used data to drive their decisions. They made their plans “living documents.” To assist with these changes they worked collaboratively with outside sources such as BOCES, State Ed and the Regional Support Service Center (RSSC). They utilized the expertise of these outsiders to help them determine the areas of deficiency in ELA.

The district hired “highly qualified teachers” and provided staff development to address needs in ELA. Training was provided to all staff including the principals, teachers, and teaching assistants. Much of this training was done by the Director of Instruction & Staff Development.

The Director of Special Programs commented on her reasons for doing things differently from her predecessor:

[T]his role has definitely changed in this district just in the last year. Prior to me, no one in this office has ever observed teaching assistants, aids or teachers. …But the building principals would do that. You know, not that they’re not qualified to do that, but I don’t believe they really know special ed well enough to know exactly what they’re looking for in a co-teaching environment; or you know, skills that teachers should have for a special needs child, skills … a teaching
assistant should have…But that role has changed. I’ve taken on those responsibilities, which I do like anyway. I prefer to observe my own teachers and aids and I even do related service people because they push into the classroom…

So, that part has changed. The role of facilitating CSE meetings definitely has changed in this district. The past administrator here, or director, excuse me, didn’t go to each and every CSE meeting. She had psychologist running the meetings. I go to them all. (K. Trever, personal communication, November 2, 2005)

As a result of the changing clientele, central office saw the need to educate their staff in issues surrounding generational poverty. They recognized that there were things within their control that they could do to impact student achievement and that teachers could not teach the same way.

3. Why did central office administrators institute the corrective actions chosen?

The reasons specified were many. Central office administrators were not satisfied with the level of detail in the district plans. The plans required more specificity.

As a result of actions taken by the former superintendent and Board of Education, the district climate was very poor. “We’re recovering from an era of a lot of mistrust, a lot of backstabbing, and a lot of top down decision making. So, there’s a lot of team building stuff that’s going on, both with the teachers and with the principals at every level. People are trying to reestablish community” (R. Tree, personal communication, October 14, 2005).

Another reason given for the actions taken by Small Rural District T was the lack of “clearly articulated systems in which to work.” The administrators involved in the
study believed that the schools were “left to their own.” They were allowed to be autonomous without regard to what was happening in the other schools. “There was not a lot of communication between those buildings” (R. Tree, personal communication, October 14, 2005). As a result, district-level administrators began setting the guidelines and coordinating the actions that took place in each school.

The root cause analysis showed that special education teachers were not teaching the students the grade-specific curriculum. In response, the Director of Special Programs took a hands-on approach to the supervision of the special education department. She began chairing all of the Committee on Special Education (CSE) meetings and she reviewed the students’ Individual Education Plans to determine if the students were properly classified. In addition, she required the teachers to redo the list of students that could take the alternative ELA assessment. Based on their numbers, there were too many students on the alternate assessment list.

The district also focused on early interventions. They believed the best way to impact the students was to “catch them early.” They implemented activities such as the Bridging Program for entering kindergartens. They also successfully grouped students for needs-based instruction.

4. How have the corrective actions implemented by central office impacted the elementary English Language Arts achievement on the State assessment?

After the February 2005 administration of the fourth grade assessment, the district moved off the list for elementary ELA. The accountability report published in October 2005 showed that the district was “in good standing” (see Table 9 and Table 10). It takes 2 years to get on the DINI list and 2 years to get off. The district made AYP on their
elementary ELA in 2003-04 and again in 2004-05. As a result, the district’s status under NCLB was put in “good standing.”

Across-District Themes

Effective Leadership

The importance of “good” leadership was a recurring theme. In these two districts, the central office staff was expected to set guidelines and to be in charge. This necessitated more centralization of the leadership than what previously existed in the districts. When this type of leadership role is taken it then impacts other areas including the way in which planning takes place in the district.

Revolving Door

Over the past 5 years, each district experienced extensive changes in central office leadership. An immediate question that comes to mind is why? Some of the movement was a result of the political climate. Often times the relationship with the Board of Education and the superintendent was contentious. This was the case in both districts. On more than one occasion administrators left before the end of their contracts.

In both districts the central office was stable until 1999. A question that comes to mind is what was the impact of the implementation of the small city budget vote on personnel? How did the dynamics of the relationship between the superintendent and the board of education change? How does the mobilization of the district-level administrators impact student achievement?
What’s My Job?

Since NCLB, each district has changed the structure of their central office. Part of the restructuring was a rewrite of the job descriptions. However, something that distinguished Small City District W from Small Rural District T is that the revised jobs and descriptions from Small City District W explicitly stated and supported their claims to be data-driven decision makers (see Appendix G).

Size and Demographics

This was an obvious difference. Small Rural District T only had one elementary building that administered the Grade 4 ELA. In Small City District W there were 11 different buildings. Small City District W was also considerably more diverse than Small Rural District T. At the elementary level, Small City District W was accountable for all students and four subgroups: (SWD, White, Black, and Economically Disadvantaged) while Small Rural District T was only accountable for three subgroups: SWD, White and Economically Disadvantaged. However, in each case the districts were targeted because of the failure of the students with disabilities to make AYP.

Quality Counts

Each district did everything in their power to make everyone within their districts highly qualified as defined by the No Child Left Behind legislation. Both were successful in fulfilling Housse requirements for paraprofessionals. They were all now teaching assistants. However, both referred to challenges in hiring, special education
teachers that were highly qualified. Administrators in Small Rural District T also talked about the importance of teachers having the right personalities to effectively work with the children.

Fiscal Affairs

Ironically, both school districts experienced being on a contingency budget. This necessitated cuts in various areas. However, the ways in which the districts responded was different. In Small City District W they eliminated positions through attrition, refused to fill vacant positions, cut funding for professional development and textbook purchases in order to protect the classroom. In Small Rural District T they cut funding for sports, the arts and 19 staff members. Parents in Small Rural District T rallied together to raise funds so the music and sports activities could continue.

Gotta Be In It to Win It

Both Small City District W and Small Rural District T were classified as Districts in Need of Improvement (DINI) because of their students with disabilities. In each case there was an over-classification of students into special education. In addition, these students were denied access to the general education curriculum. Initially, students did not have access to the same textbooks. This was in part because of the teachers’ low expectations. Instead, students were involved with basic skills activities such as “baking muffins.” However, both districts began holding the special education teachers responsible for teaching the curriculum.
It’s Time for a Change

It is a fact that the demographics of the nation’s schools are changing. In the districts under review, both had an increasing population of students from low-income families. Ask teachers in these districts if students are like they were 20 years ago, odds are they would say, “No”, but yet, the teachers continue to try to teach the students the same way. This is a dilemma that Small City District W and Small Rural District T both faced. In response, both districts came up with the same solution. Each felt their teachers would benefit from the work of Ruby Payne on understanding generational poverty. Payne talks about the hidden rules of class. She advocates using these rules and appropriate teaching strategies other than lecturing to reach this segment of the population.

NCLB

The major thread between both case studies was the discussion of No Child Left Behind. All of the district administrators commented on the perceived effectiveness of the NCLB legislation. Their comments were either pro or con. There were aspects of NCLB that all of the administrators appreciated; however, they had their share of negative comments regarding NCLB too.

Pros

“The most significant difference is disaggregating that data by subgroups. … That’s No Child Left Behind and that’s a good thing. That’s the best thing about No Child Left Behind” (R. Tree, personal communication, October 27, 2005).
The legislation forced the central office administrators to pay attention to the disaggregated data. NCLB focused on the achievement levels of their special education population, minority students, and economically disadvantaged students. Indeed, this was one of the objectives of NCLB. However, the goal of eliminating the achievement gap has yet to be realized.

Another positive aspect of the legislation for these administrators is the focus on highly qualified teachers and teaching assistants. The Director of Instruction & Staff Development from Small Rural District T indicated in her district, “They haven’t balked about the highly qualified teacher thing [and] they haven’t balked about the tests” (R. Tree, personal communication, October 14, 2005).

In the opinion of the Small City District W’s Director of Support Programs, one thing the State has done is provided some additional resources to the schools that were in need of improvement:

Although we do have a school that’s in need of improvement they qualify for money at the state level. So, it’s allowed us to actually pay for some of the products that we’ve been able to bring in. So, it’s not necessarily a negative consequence. There is clearly more awareness on all levels though. There’s more of a focus and awareness on the board level then there probably had been prior to the state’s accountability system. (M. Worse, personal communication, October 28, 2005)
Cons

It has lots of consequences. …We’re teaching to the tests now rather than teaching kids. You know, any skilled teacher can assess students’ strengths and weaknesses. And they can provide, you know, whatever they need … to achieve their potential. But, when you’re delegated actually to teach to a test and assess just so you don’t get in trouble and become a school in need, although we did anyway… (LOL) That’s a consequence to me. I mean, we can use the tax dollars a lot differently than doing what we’re doing. I know we’re using them [tax dollars], to get them ready for the tests, to buy the test, …to have people help us do analysis of the test and see what’s going on. I think that’s a problem. (K. Trever, personal communication, November 2, 2005)

Eight of the nine district administrators believed that NCLB was largely unfunded and as a result districts were unduly stressed. In the words of one superintendent, “NCLB is doomed to fail.” In October 2005, he complained about the lack of specificity from the State in regards to testing schedules and requirements for exams that were going to be given in Grades 3-8 in January 2006.

Four administrators specifically talked about the media’s focus on the negative. The Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction from Small City School District W called the media’s actions irresponsible. Rather than focus on the gains that the district had made they only focused on the negative:

I think the most devastating aspect of No Child Left Behind is the media using it as fodder for hype. I can’t say enough about how the media is destroying the intent. It’s not helping us in any way shape or form… Our local media has been
horrendous. They’ve used it as an attack on the school system. When we report our data they only report the negative aspects of where we’re failing and neglect … to capture any of our growth. … We’ll put together a report that shows we’ve had 35% increase in our math performance over a 5-year period of time, which is very significant and, and that that won’t go into the paper. What will only go into [the paper] is “Schools are failing special education students in English language arts,” even if there’s been improvement in that area. If we’re below that cut off and we’re still on the list [for needing improvement], they won’t say how far below. They don’t print the initiatives that we’re doing. They just print the negatives. …That’s been the most detrimental aspect of this. And, through the media then you have the additional stress that it causes parents [and] students. The media is so in your face about the whole thing that it adds a dimension of stress that we can work on to eliminate and then in one headline they destroy it. As a former journalist and teacher too, it’s very disheartening to me as an educator to watch. (F. Wisher, personal communication, October 27, 2005)

Seven of the nine administrators commented specifically about the affective effect the legislation was having on their staff and students. The district administrators reported on the level of stress that existed in their districts. The Assistant for Superintendent and Instruction in Small City District W saw her role as being a “stress buster.” The Director of Instruction & Staff Development from Small Rural District T was frustrated that she allowed the “testing” to get to her. She indicated the accountability pressure has changed her job:
It’s probably the only thing I think about; and, I really feel like I’m constantly contradicting myself. On one hand I’ll say, “You know, don’t worry about these tests. It’s [a] one-shot picture of what’s happening in our district. You know we shouldn’t be teaching to the test. We should teach to our blueprints and the tests will follow.” So, I’m constantly saying this to people, but then on the other hand I’m saying, “We need to get the hell off these lists because more and more of our own decision making will be taken out of our owns as we get deeper and deeper into this account system.” So, I constantly feel like I contradict myself, but it is foremost in my mind since I’m dealing with all the testing and all the data is flowing through my office and we’re trying to figure out what exactly is causing this to happen. (R. Tree, personal communication, October 20, 2005)

The superintendent from Small Rural District T commented on the sanctions and measures. Rather than be fearful of them, his response was, “Right now to me its water off my back” (T. Thomas, personal communication, October 13, 2005).

**Closing**

This chapter contained the findings from the study. In light of these findings, the next chapter looks at the conclusions and recommendations for policy and practice. Chapter 5 ends with possible topics for future research as it applies to educational leadership.
CHAPTER V

Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations

After decades of reform efforts, in 2001, President George W. Bush signed the reauthorization of the Elementary Secondary Education Act, known as No Child Left Behind. The aim of this study was to determine if district-level administrators responded to the pressure of the new NCLB legislation, and if so, discover what actions they took. Specifically, this study examined the actions taken to improve elementary ELA achievement in two districts in New York State: Small City District W and Small Rural District T. In this chapter conclusions are drawn regarding the actions taken and their implications for educational leadership. This section ends with a list of recommended topics for further research.

Conclusions

This was a qualitative study of two small New York State districts’ efforts to improve ELA scores and as such generalities cannot be made. However, having done a thorough review of the data from the two districts involved in the study, the researcher concluded that the central office administrators did respond to the accountability pressures from NCLB. The administrators in Small City District W and Small Rural District T became proactive, intervening and centralizing rather than decentralizing their power which was previously done in the districts. This was corroborated by other studies (Mitchell & Raphael, 1999; Spillane, 1998; Weinbaum, 2004). However, District W was further along on the centralizing authority continuum. This may be in part because of District W’s focus on “customer service”.
Table 11

*Research-Based District Responses*

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<th>Research-Based District Responses</th>
<th>Small City District W</th>
<th>Small Rural District T</th>
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<tr>
<td>Focus on all students learning</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
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<td>Dynamic/distributed leadership</td>
<td>Strong</td>
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<td>Sustained improvement efforts</td>
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<td>High expectations for adults</td>
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<td>Aligned curriculum and assessment</td>
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<td>Coordinated/embedded professional development</td>
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<td>Quality classroom instruction</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interpret / Manage External Environment</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Weak</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note* * The districts were compared to the themes found in Shannon’s & Bylsma’s (2004) meta-analysis of over 80 studies. Figure 3, found in Chapter 2 lists ten of these studies.
Using the common themes from the meta-analysis (see Figure 3) described in chapter 2, the researcher compared the overt actions taken by central office administrators in each district. This analysis appears in Table 11. This figure represents a comprehensive list of all the themes that emerged from the research and articles on actions taken by districts to improve instruction from 1989 – 2004. The existence of each theme in District W and District T was measured based on the data collected. To rate the quality of the actions taken in the two districts the researcher used the terms: strong, moderate, and weak. The ratings were based on the specific actions taken by the central office staff as reported in the data. The proactive nature of the central office’s responses was consistent with the findings from Weinbaum (2004). In his study entitled, Tale of Two Systems: School Districts and State Accountability Policies, Weinbaum discussed the quality of the responses from the district administrators. It was Weinbaum that talked about “Type A” responses. The terms he used to describe this response typology were: interventionist, active, differentiated, prescriptive, and coherent. At the opposite end of the continuum was the Type B typology: non-interventionist, passive, generic, non-prescriptive, and unaligned. Type A districts centralized control, while Type B districts decentralized their control. Using these definitions, both districts involved in this study would be classified as Type A districts. This may be in part because district-level administrators are the ones at the center of the NCLB accountability; they are the “hub of the wheel” (see Figure 15). It is the central office administrator that answers to the Board of Education, the media, and the community at large. In small districts, they are also the individuals that interact with all the levels of the organization and as such, they are in a prime position to influence change within the district and direct the reform activities.
Figure 15. Role of Central Office - center of the wheel.
This is one reason why the researcher concluded that a major part of the central office administrator’s role is to “coordinate” the reform activities and the efforts.

The researcher hypothesized that Small City District W’s focus on customer service led to the district’s higher ratings in district responsiveness. District W initiated more actions that promoted change. For example, the district administrators did not expect the principals to conduct the root cause analysis; they did this work for the principals. As a result, in theory, the principals had more time to focus on the instructional program within their buildings. The researcher concluded that this customer service approach to leadership had a positive effect on the results in Small City District W. However, in spite of the differences in the quality of the two districts’ actions, both districts managed to get off the “hit list.” Small City District W remained a year one District in Need of Improvement (DINI) and Small Rural District T became a district in “good standing.” During the 2001-02 school year, only 64% \((n = 579)\) of the fourth graders in Small City District W scored a level 3 or 4 on the state’s ELA assessment. This number included the students with disabilities. By 2005, the number of students in District W scoring level 3 or 4 increased to 74% \((n = 585)\), compared to only 70% of the fourth graders state-wide meeting the ELA standards. Between 2001 and 2005, each year the district’s scores increased. This, however, was not the case for Small Rural District T. In 2001-02, only 53% \((n = 146)\) of the students scored at the proficient level. The number of students reaching proficiency went up to 57% \((n = 197)\) in 2003; however, the scores dropped back to 54% \((n = 145)\) the following year. In 2005, 55% \((n = 152)\) of the students reached a level 3 or 4. As a result of meeting AYP for 2 years in a row, the Small Rural District T was put in “good standing.” However, looking at the
scores from the two districts it is hard not to ask, “What is wrong with this picture?”

Critiques of NCLB warned that this very thing would happen; districts that were actually performing worse would be deemed in “good standing” while higher performing districts were labeled, “districts in need of improvement” (Armstrong, 2004; Johnston & Viadero, 2000; Popham, 2004). The mean scale score for Small City District W was 664 while the mean scale score for Small Rural District T was only 647. The performance index (PI) for the two districts also showed the discrepancy. The ultimate goal for districts is to reach a PI equal to 200 by 2013-14. In 2005, Small City District W’s PI was equal to 169, while Small Rural District’s PI was only 143. As legislatures prepare for the 2007 reauthorization of NCLB, they must rewrite the law so that it makes sense.

The researcher noted that despite Small Rural District T’s “weak” rating on “quality classroom instruction,” they still managed to get off the “list.” This outcome caused the researcher to investigate this phenomenon. Indeed, it was contrary to existing research on district-wide reform efforts (Anderson, 2003, Cawelti & Prothero, 2001; David & Shields, 2001, Massell, 2000; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2003; Spillane & Thompson, 1997; Togneri & Anderson, 2003). However, upon further investigation, the researcher discovered that in October 2005, the New York State Education Department petitioned the U.S. Department of Education and won the ability to recalculate the AYP for the special education population. As stated in chapter 4, both districts were identified because of their special education population. Now, as a result of the change to the State’s accountability system, if districts are identified only because of the “students with disabilities” subgroup, the State may use a different formula to determine if the district made AYP:
In cases of failure to make AYP solely because of the performance of students with disabilities, meeting the 95% participation requirement for this group and subject and meeting or exceeding the AMO if 34 points were added to the PI for this group and subject is an approved way of making AYP for students with disabilities. (NYSED Report Card, 2005d)

Looking more closely at the 2005 scores from Small Rural District T, the researcher also realized that the number of students with disabilities that were tested was less than 30. As a result, the State report does not even include the special education information for 2005. This is done for statistical reasons. However, this researcher believes, as a result, the “good standing” label can be misleading. In the 5 years since NCLB was implemented the total percentage of students that met or exceeded the ELA standards in Small Rural District T has “flat lined” at a level that is 15% lower than the total State’s percentage and 19% lower than Small City District W.

Another conclusion that was drawn from the data is the changing role of the central office administrator. Now, the district-level administrators must concern themselves with the stress level involved in the new accountability system under NCLB (Reeves, 2004). In the words of one administrator, they must become “stress busters.” As such, the central office administrators must be individuals that can accept and handle change themselves (Anderson, 2003; Fullan, 2003; Fullan & Stiegelbauer, 1991; O’Day, Bitter, & Perry, 2003). In addition, there is a greater emphasis on the necessity for central office administrators to be instructional leaders too (Castagnola, 2005; Cross, 2000). Along with this changing role was a new emphasis on the district administrators finding and bringing into the district “research-based instructional strategies.”
One aspect that can add to the central office administrator’s stress level is the perceived length of tenure in the central office. Based on the data from these two districts, the researcher concluded that turnover in the central office staff in small districts has been a common occurrence since 2001. The researcher referred to this phenomenon as the “revolving door syndrome.” It appeared to be one of the “signs of the times.” This is consistent with a November 2004 study by the New York State Council of School Superintendents (NYSCOSS). However, in this study, it attributed a lot of the turnover to the aging of the Baby Boomers. NYSCOSS predicts that two thirds of the superintendencies will be open by 2008. This was the case in Small Rural District T. In 2001, the superintendent retired. However, his successor did not leave because of retirement, but instead had his contract bought out.

Much of the existing research on the turnover of central office staff deals with the term-lengths of superintendents in large urban districts. An article by Natkin et al. (2002) discussed the “myth” of the revolving door. It reviewed a study by Gary Yee and Larry Cuban (1996) entitled, “When is Tenure Long Enough?” Yee and Cuban’s study indicated that the average term-length was 5.76 years. They indicated that this was considerably longer than the 2.5 years that was often reported for the term-length of superintendents. However, the study did not include interim superintendents nor did it include other district-level administrators (i.e., assistant superintendents, directors, coordinators, etc.). There are few studies that look at turnover of the rest of the leadership in the district office. This researcher believes the term-length of the entire central office staff is an issue that must be taken into consideration when discussing district-wide reform movements. If districts are to maintain the progress made in their
districts, they must put processes and structures in place that allow the districts to build leadership capacity. The knowledge-base should not be dependent on the people in the office. Although districts need to centralize their improvement efforts, at the same time they must learn how to distribute leadership like the spokes on the wheel (see Figure 15). This sustained leadership is critical for improvement. Districts must make commitments to reform efforts for the long haul.

All in the Same Boat Now

Both districts were labeled in need of improvement because of their special education populations. Each district’s classification rate was higher than state’s 12% average. The districts indicated that many of these students were classified because of reading problems and lack of exposure to the grade-specific curriculum (IRA, 2003; Lyons, 2002).

More than ever, districts must recognize that all students need to be successful. In the study, this was facilitated through a collaborative planning process that involved special education and regular education. Emphasis was placed on all students having access to the “regular ed,” grade-specific curriculum. This reinforced the need for the district to adopt the differentiation of instruction as one of its goals. If districts don’t meet the needs of all their students, they are in essence, sending students “up a creek without a paddle.” At the same time, this theme reinforced the need for the regular education and special education departments to work closely together. Collaborative planning must be built into the district structure. In addition, administrators must allow for extended learning opportunities. They must provide resources and time for summer
school and after-school programs. District administrators can insist that the special education population have access to all of the academic intervention programs provided within the district.

In addition, the researcher concluded that district office must hire the best teachers for the job. Both districts in this study emphasized, not only the need for highly qualified teachers, but also for teachers that are committed to students. This is an area with which Small City District T struggled. It has been difficult for them to attract “highly qualified” special education teachers to their area. This researcher concluded that this was partially because of the location and also the size of the district. This may be another factor contributing to the district’s “weak” rating on quality classroom instruction. The Director of Special Programs saw the need to start supervising and doing observations on the special education staff. However, because the Director of Special Programs had only been in the district a couple of months at the time of the study, this was something that she was just starting. (This is also another example of the district office centralizing their authority). However, Human Resources within this district also reinforced the importance of small rural districts developing partnerships with colleges and universities in and outside of their area in order to find and recruit a sufficient number of qualified candidates.

In light of the possible shortages with specialized staff in small districts, central office administrators should also investigate the use of technology to meet some of the instructional needs within their districts. This is an area that Small City District W was investigating. It will be interesting to revisit the site in future years to see the impact of
the district’s decision to use technology to address some of the assessment and academic intervention service needs of the students.

Get to the Root of the Matter

A key component of improving academic achievement is being able to articulate the reasons why students were not successful to begin with. It is imperative that districts get to the root causes within their control. This necessitates that district administrators have the knowledge and skill to conduct root cause analysis for their districts. However, from the data collected, the researcher also concluded that in order to be truly effective, central office administrators must have the technological skills necessary to manipulate the data. Another conclusion drawn from this study is the necessity of computer systems to aid in the data collection, analysis, and reporting of the findings. Furthermore, in light of the NCLB requirement for scientifically-based research, central office administrators must make data-driven decisions based on the effectiveness of these programs and the instruction.

For example, both districts determined that one root cause was the staff’s lack of understanding of “generational poverty.” As a result, each district relied on the work of Ruby Payne (1996) to address this issue. Further longitudinal research will need to be conducted to determine if this common action taken by central office positively impacted their students’ achievement. The work of Ruby Payne has met with some criticism from others in the educational circles. It will be interesting to follow-up with these districts to determine if despite the criticisms, the districts have experienced any positive outcomes.
Finally, the researcher concluded that NCLB is becoming a “numbers game.” It appears that New York State, like other states, has “tweaked” the formulas to “improve” the results (NYSED Report Card, 2005). More research needs to be done that compares the results under the various systems. The researcher recommends that now that the districts are doing State testing in Grades 3-8 that a growth model should be considered. Now instead of comparing students to different cohorts, the districts (and State) will have the ability to compare a child’s progress from year-to-year.

The district administrators within this study were concerned about the public image of their districts under NCLB. It is unfortunate that the much of the media coverage around districts is so negative. However, it is hopeful that reporting on a growth model rather than just reporting scores will result in a more fair assessment of the progress being made in the State’s districts and schools.

**Leadership Styles**

Chapter 4 contained the responses taken by central office administrators in the two districts. As part of the analysis, the researcher made note of the leadership that was portrayed. Throughout the discussion, although not always explicitly stated, the following styles were described:

1. Service Leadership
2. Conditional Leadership
Service Leadership

One of the themes that surfaced was the concept of service. The respondents referred to their district administrators’ role as a service provider. The district administrators were willing to do what they needed in order to support the principals and teachers in the effective leadership and operation of their schools. The ultimate goal is to do what will ultimately help the children.

Conditional Leadership

Many of the district administrators’ comments indicated that the amount of intervention and support they provided was dependent on the capability of those with whom they were interacting. The researcher refers to this style of governance as “conditional leadership.” The easiest way to conceptualize this style of leadership is by using the example of a flow chart. For example, the decision box asks, “Is the principal a good leader?” If yes, the district administrator provides basic support. However, if the person is not a “good leader” the district administrator would first analyze why the individual did not measure up. Depending on the reasons for the lack of performance, the district level administrator would then provide strong, focused, support in the area of weakness. Help would be provided by giving the principal a mentor, sending the principal to staff development, holding the principal accountable for demanding more of his staff, and so on.

However, other factors surfaced that influenced the decisions. Specifically, the pressures resulting from the Board of Education and the media also impacted the
Revised Conceptual Framework Map
(Adapted from Weinbaum, 2004)

Prior to No Child Left Behind (Pre-NCLB) 1999-2002
  - Accountability

Under No Child Left Behind (Under-NCLB) 2002-2005
  - Accountability
  - Teacher Quality
  - Options and Choices for Parents
  - Instructional Methods

State Accountability Policies
  * AYP formulas

- Focus attention
- Motivate action
- Feedback

District Corrective Actions (ELA) (Central Office Administrators)
  - Data use
  - Curriculum & Instruction
  - Professional Development
  - Resource Allocation

District Contextual Characteristics
  - Performance
  - Leadership
  - Resources
  - Organization
  - Size
  - Media*
  - Culture
  - History
  - Knowledge/skill
  - Demographics
  - Board of Ed*
  - Staff turn over*

Elementary School Instructional Practices:
  - Data use
  - Curriculum & Instruction
  - Professional Development
  - Resource Allocation
  - Type A or Type B
  - Centralized or Decentralized

School Contextual Characteristics
  - Performance
  - Leadership
  - Resources
  - Class Size
  - Demographics
  - Culture
  - History
  - Knowledge/skill
  - Organization
  - Media*

Improved student ELA performance outcomes

* Additions to contextual map

Figure 16. Revised conceptual framework map.
decisions made by central office. As a result, a revised conceptual framework is shown in Figure 16.

Recommendations for Future Research

Through the course of this study, various topics surfaced that warrant further investigation. January 2006 was the first year that a New York State ELA test was administered in Grades 3-8. This will render other districts accountable for more subgroups. As a result, more districts will fall prey to the NCLB sanctions. Other districts will be interested in which subgroups caused the districts to be labeled. In addition, they will want information on what central office administrators did to improve ELA performance. This researcher recommends that the New York State Education Department develop a repository that contains districts that were labeled in need of improvement. They should be listed by the subgroups that resulted in the classification. For those that get off the list they should indicate the actions taken to bring about the change.

These following topics may prove to be worthy of further investigation:

1. Replicate this study using districts with different demographics
2. Replicate this study in different states and with different content (i.e., math)
3. Add a quantitative component to this study. For example, survey district administrators and principals about the district-level responses to NCLB.
4. Study how the number of accountability subgroups for which a district is held responsible impacts the actions taken by central office administrators.
5. Replicate the study in a district where the central office administrators have been in place since 2001.

6. Research the relationship of central office with the Board of Education. Study the perceived changes in the roles and responsibilities of the Board of Education and the Central Office Administrators.

7. Study the impact of the small city vote on the perceived role of the trustees on the Board of Education.

8. Examine how the length of the superintendents’ tenure has changed since small cities began voting on a portion of the school budget.

9. Do a longitudinal study to research the impact of central office’s responses (i.e., use of work on generation poverty, extended learning time, and so on).

Closing

There are many areas related to this study that researchers may choose to tackle in the future. As No Child Left Behind continues, and districts within the State begin to get the results from the Grades 3-8 state testing, more districts will be in a position of having to take action as a result of being classified as a DINI. This study will add to this knowledge base and offer possible solutions to central office administrators that find themselves in a position of having to improve their scores under NCLB.
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Hayes, D. (2004). *State policy and district responsiveness: The relationship between district responsiveness to New York State policy in the areas of standards and*
assessments and district socio-economic status and district performance on assessment tests. Jamaica, NY: St. John’s University.


New York State Education Department. (2005c). *Template for letter from school superintendents notifying parents that their child's LEA has been newly identified for improvement.* Retrieved May 7, 2005, from http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/deputy/nclb/dini/newyear1template.html


Title VII Bilingual Education Act of 1968.


Appendix A

Researchers’ Vitae
Personal Summary
A self-motivated professional committed to the education of young people—possessing strong leadership qualities and the ability to solve problems given the available resources. I am a facilitator with exceptional strengths in written and oral communications and interpersonal skills.

Educational History and Professional Development

Seton Hall University – South Orange, NJ 2004-2006
Full-time student in Executive Ed.D. Program - Educational Leadership, Management & Policy (GPA 3.92)

Teacher's College/Columbia University – New York, NY 1996-1999
Continuing Education Student in Teaching and Curriculum (GPA 3.88)

Certificate of Advance Study Degree in Educational Administration and Supervision – (GPA 3.88)
Masters of Science Degree in Elementary Reading Education – (GPA 3.88)

Nyack College – Nyack, NY 1980-1983
Bachelor of Science Degree in Education with a minor in Psychology – (GPA 3.47)

Work Experience

Kingston City Schools Consolidated - Kingston, NY October 2002-Present
Director of Elementary Education - as part of the Central office Curriculum and Instruction team, I assist in the hiring, supervision and management of the elementary staff Pre-K through 6. I set the vision and direction for curriculum at the elementary level. I coordinate all curriculum and staff development needs for the Pre-K through grade 6 staff including curriculum and grade level meetings. In addition, I am the coordinator for the K-12 gifted and talented program known as Kingston's Alternative Learning Program (KALP), the K-8 Reading Department and the Site Coordinator for the Reading Recovery Training Site housed in our District which services 15 other districts.

Teachers College Distinguished Educator Program - New York, NY July 2000 - June 2001
Lead Teacher for a Distance Education Course designed to assist teachers seeking National Board Certification in Early Childhood. Responsible for the planning, design and implementation of the course and coordinating the activities of the content specialists hired to help the candidates.

Coordinator Model Schools / Distance Education (Sept. 2000 - Present) – I managed and supervised the Model Schools Department and helped build capacity within Ulster County Districts through instructional technology planning, customized professional development, identification of technology leaders and integrators, and the continuous improvement of instruction through peer review and demonstration. In addition, I planned and coordinated the Model Schools Course offerings, the equipment inventory, state and federal grants involved with the infusion of technology: Tri-County Technology Literacy Challenge Grant, Model Schools Mini Grants and the Learning Technology Grant. I also served on the Mid-Hudson Leadership Academy's Implementation Council. I coordinated the Academy's follow-up sessions for the Magellan Foundation's NY TALKS (Technology, Achievement, Leadership, Knowledge, and Skills. This initiative provided superintendents and principals with a vision for technology.

Model Schools Instructional Specialist (Nov 1999 – Sept 2000) – I supervised over sixty teachers (K-8) from eight Ulster County districts and the Arch Diocese schools on a Tri-County Collaborative English, Language Arts, Math, Science and Technology grant with Sullivan and Orange/Ulster BOCES. This included site visitations, meetings with administrative staff and training of teachers in the effective implementation of the New York State Standards through the use of technology. I helped plan and teach courses for Model Schools and also worked with area high schools to design Distance Education course enhancements which
used a variety of formats: compressed video, online courses, and a few “live” sessions. In addition, I secured funding and started the Ulster BOCES National Board Certification Support Program.

First grade teacher at John F. Kennedy Elementary School – In addition to classroom duties I assisted the principal with various duties (i.e., scheduling, covering the office and interacting with parents). During the 1991-92 school year I taught third grade.

National Board for Professional Teaching Standards – Monmouth Junction, NJ July 1999
Early Childhood / Generalist Assessor – Responsible for scoring the science portion of the portfolios submitted by candidates applying for National Board Certification. This involved reading their 10-page commentary and a video of their teaching to determine if they demonstrated accomplished teaching. The candidates were early childhood teachers (Pre-K through Third Grade).

Ulster County Multi-Service Center, Inc. – Kingston, NY 1990-Present
Director & Founder of King’s Kids Community Program since 1983 – Responsible for hiring staff, recruiting volunteers, program development and implementation. Currently collaborating with the Kingston City School District on the TOPS (an acronym I created meaning Teachers, Organizations and Parents for Students) 21st Century Grant. UCMSC provides student mentors and modular facilitators for various activities including technology, recreation and the arts.

In addition to writing documentation and designing help panels for IBM computer software products, I was responsible for training new hires in my area.

Director of the NAACP’s component of the program – Worked with the parents of the students involved in LPP. My duties included scheduling and coordinating parent workshops, making home visits and serving as their ombudsman.

Activities and Accomplishments

Member of International Reading Association
Member of Kappa Delta Pi since May 1994
Co-presented at the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) Conference in D.C. - Nov 2003
Co-presented two workshops at NYSCATE in Buffalo - November 2002
Attended NY TALKS (Technology, Achievement, Leadership, Knowledge and Skills) Conference – July 2002
YWCA Tribute to Women – Community Organization of the Year – for the King’s Kids Program - October 2001
Recipient of Ulster County’s Red Ribbon Coalition Community Member Honor - October 2001
Math Lesson, “Best Shape for a Wheel” posted on NYS Academy of Teaching and Learning’s website (2001)
The Institute for Educational Leadership’s Education Policy Fellowship Program - Fellow in NY Chapter (2000-2001)
State Peer Review and induction into the New York State Academy of Teaching and Learning - March 2000
Nationally Board Certified Teacher – Early Childhood/Generalist (Since Nov. 1998) and Mentor
Featured in New York State School Board Association Magazine (November 1999)
Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) Member
Math, Science, Technology Integrated Curriculum Grant Participant and Demonstration Teacher - (Since Nov. 1998)
State Educational Registration Review (SURR) Team Member – November 1998
Facilitator for State Education Conference on Early Childhood Literacy – July 1997
NYSED Task Force responsible for designing the Early Elementary Resource Guide to Integrated Learning
“Read to Me” a video created for parents that I narrated, wrote, directed and produced
Recipient of The Integrated Early Intervention Child Network Award – February 1999
Recipient of Kiwana’s Citizenship Award – September 1998
Fellowship with Dr. Irene Lober – Chairman of Department of Educational Administration SUNY New Paltz 1995
Educational Tour in New Zealand – Summer 1994 (Part of course work for Master's Program)
Recipient of Tribute to Women honor from YWCA (1991)
Appendix B

Letters of Solicitation and Informed Consent
Dear Central Office Administrator,

I am a full-time doctoral student in the Executive Ed.D. program within the College of Education, Leadership, Management and Policy at Seton Hall University. I am currently preparing to do a comparative study of the impact of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation on central office administrators.

Many districts around the country are labeled in need of improvement under NCLB. My purpose with this study is to look at the different corrective actions taken by selected district-level administrators in New York State in response to the accountability measures imposed by NCLB. My research looks specifically at corrective actions taken at the district level to improve the students’ elementary English language arts achievement.

Your participation in this study will require approximately one (1) hour.

If you choose to participate in the study, your involvement will include participation in an open-ended interview. The interview questions will focus on NCLB and corrective actions taken to improve ELA scores. Sample questions include the following:

- “What are the major strategies that the district is adopting or using to improve ELA student achievement in its elementary schools?”
- “What programs or resources does the district offer or provide to help elementary schools improve instruction in ELA?”
- “What programs do you offer specifically targeted to underachieving schools or students?”
- “How is what your district doing now different from what you did prior to NCLB?”

Participation in this study is voluntary. Participants may opt out before and during the interview. There is no penalty if an individual decides not to participate and no one will know if a participant chooses to drop out of the study.

The anonymity of each subject will be maintained. Each participant will be identified with a code. Only their codes, not their names, will be placed on transcripts and recordings of interviews. The researcher will change all names to protect the identity of the district and personnel.

All data, recordings and transcripts will be kept in a locked cabinet in the researcher’s office. The data will remain in the locked cabinet for a period of no less than three years after the completion of the study before being destroyed.

Sincerely,

Paula C. Childs
Researcher, Seton Hall University
childsp@shu.edu
September 8, 2005

Dear Assistant Superintendent,

I am a full-time doctoral student in the Executive Ed.D. program within the College of Education, Leadership, Management and Policy at Seton Hall University. I am currently preparing to do a comparative study of the impact of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation on central office administrators.

Many districts around the country are labeled in need of improvement under NCLB. My purpose with this study is to look at the different corrective actions taken by selected district-level administrators in New York State in response to the accountability measures imposed by NCLB. My research looks specifically at corrective actions taken at the district level to improve the students' elementary English language arts achievement.

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- “What programs or resources does the district offer or provide to help elementary schools improve instruction in ELA?”
- “What programs do you offer specifically targeted to underachieving schools or students?”
- “How is what your district doing now different from what you did prior to NCLB?”

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All data, recordings and transcripts will be kept in a locked cabinet in the researcher’s office. The data will remain in the locked cabinet for a period of no less than three years after the completion of the study before being destroyed.

Sincerely,

Paula C. Childs

Paula C. Childs,
Researcher, Seton Hall University
childspn@shu.edu
REQUEST FOR APPROVAL OF RESEARCH, DEMONSTRATION OR RELATED ACTIVITIES INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS

All material must be typed.

PROJECT TITLE: A Comparative Study of the Ways in Which Selected New York State District Administrators in Districts In Need of Improvement Respond to the No Child Left Behind Act

CERTIFICATION STATEMENT:

In making this application, I (we) certify that I (we) have read and understand the University's policies and procedures governing research, development, and related activities involving human subjects. I (we) shall comply with the letter and spirit of those policies. I (we) further acknowledge my (our) obligation to (1) obtain written approval of significant deviations from the originally-approved protocol BEFORE making those deviations, and (2) report immediately all adverse effects of the study on the subjects to the Director of the Institutional Review Board, Seton Hall University, South Orange, NJ 07079.

**Please print or type out names of all researchers below signature. Use separate sheet of paper, if necessary**

Paula C. Childs
RESEARCHER(S) OR PROJECT DIRECTOR(S)

My signature indicates that I have reviewed the attached materials and consider them to meet IRB standards.

RESEARCHER'S ADVISOR OR DEPARTMENTAL SUPERVISOR

The request for approval submitted by the above researcher(s) was considered by the IRB for Research Involving Human Subjects Research at the meeting.

The application was approved not approved by the Committee. Special conditions were were not set by the IRB. (Any special conditions are described on the reverse side.)

DIRECTOR,
SETON HALL UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD FOR HUMAN SUBJECTS RESEARCH

Seton Hall University
Informed Consent Form

Researcher’s Affiliation
The researcher is a doctoral student in the department of Education Leadership, Management and Policy at Seton Hall University.

Purpose and Duration
This research will examine the corrective actions taken in response to No Child Left Behind (NCLB) by central office administrators working in districts in need of improvement in English language arts. Participation in this research will require approximately one hour.

Procedures
This research will consist of participation in an open-ended interview lasting approximately one hour.

Instrument
The open-ended interview questions will focus on NCLB and corrective actions taken to improve ELA scores. Sample questions include the following:

- “What are the major strategies that the district is adopting or using to improve ELA student achievement in its elementary schools?”
- “What programs or resources does the district offer or provide to help elementary schools improve instruction in ELA?”
- “What programs do you offer specifically targeted to underscoring schools or students?”
- “How is what your district doing now different from what you did prior to NCLB?”

Voluntary Nature
Participation in this study is voluntary. Participants may opt out before, and during the interview. There is no penalty if an individual decides not to participate and no one will know if a participant chooses to drop out of the study.

Anonymity
Each participant will be identified with a code. Only their codes, not their names, will be placed on transcripts and recordings of interviews. The researcher will change all names to protect the identity of the district and personnel.

Confidentiality
All data, recordings and transcripts will be kept in a locked cabinet in the researcher’s office. The data will remain in the locked cabinet for a period of no less than three years after the completion of the study before being destroyed.

Research Records
Only the researcher and her dissertation committee will have access to the research data.

Seton Hall University Institutional Review Board

Expiry Date

College of Education and Human Services
Executive Ed.D. Program
400 South Orange Avenue • South Orange, New Jersey 07079-2085

Approval Date

ENRICHING THE MIND, THE HEART AND THE SPIRIT
Risks
There are no risks associated with this research.

Benefits
There are no personal benefits to the volunteers associated with this research. However, the results of this study may help central office administrators avoid unsuccessful methodology and implement research-based corrective actions in their districts that may help improve ELA scores and meet NCLB requirement. This research may also reveal weaknesses inherent in the NCLB legislation.

Compensation
There is no compensation for participation in this research.

Alternative Procedures
Alternative procedures do not apply with this research.

Contact Information
Please contact the following people if you have any questions concerning the research:

Paula C. Childs, Researcher (973) 275-2728
Daniel Gutmore, Ph.D., Faculty Advisor (973) 275-2853
Department of Education Leadership, Management, and Policy
Seton Hall University
400 South Orange Avenue
South Orange, NJ 07079-2685

Mary F. Ruzicka, Ph.D., IRB Director (973) 313-6314
Office of the Institutional Review Board
Presidents Hall – 3rd Floor
Seton Hall University
400 South Orange Avenue
South Orange, NJ 07079

Participants may view a copy of the researcher’s dissertation upon completion of the study. The dissertation will be available in the Walsh Library at the Seton Hall University main campus.

Audio-tapes
Participants who sign this Informed Consent Form are also giving permission for their interview sessions to be audio taped. Upon completion of this research, the audiotapes will be stored in a locked cabinet in the researcher’s office of which only the researcher has access. The data and audiotapes will remain in this locked cabinet for a period of no less than three years before they are destroyed.

Informed Consent Form
Participants will receive a signed and dated copy of this Informed Consent Form.

Participant’s Signature
Seton Hall University
Institutional Review Board
SEP 21 2005

Expiration Date
SEP 21 2006

Date
Appendix C

Interview Guide

Questions adapted from Elliot Weinbaum (2004)

Note: There are a set of questions for superintendents, other district administrators and individuals in charge of curriculum and instruction, professional development, and data use.

Questions for Superintendent

1. I have reviewed some basic demographic and descriptive information about your district, but can you tell me some important things I should know about this district in order to have a deeper understanding of it?
2. What is your previous position/experience?
3. What do you see as the district role in supporting elementary schools?
4. How has this role changed over the last 3 to 5 years? How and why?
5. Does the district’s role differ with regard to elementary schools X and Y? If so, how and why? (If we are only looking at one elementary school in the district, ask if the one we are looking at has a different relationship than the others.)
6. What are the district’s specific goals for elementary schools? How were these goals identified?
7. How does this fit into the district’s overall goals?
8. What are the challenges in meeting these goals? (Probes: financial resources? Human resources? Other?)
9. Do these goals and challenges differ for different elementary schools in the District?
10. Give me a thumbnail description of the changes that the district has made in elementary schools over the last five years. Why did you make these changes?

11. What are the major strategies that the district is adopting or using to improve student achievement in its elementary schools? (Probe on specific programs and initiatives.)

12. If I were a principal of an elementary school in this district striving to improve performance, what role would the district play in my life? How much autonomy would I have in locating assistance? How much assistance would the district provide?

13. If I were a department head in this district…?

14. If I were a teacher in this district…?

15. What is the district strategy to deal with students who do not meet the State requirements on the ELA or other benchmarks that the district has established? Are there programs, interventions, or assistance for such students along the way?

16. Can you paint a picture of the programs that are available to your district and to elementary schools to improve elementary school performance on the ELA? What other resources are available to your district to help elementary schools reach their goals? What about work being done by or with local foundations, teacher networks, university partnerships, and/or grassroots efforts?

17. How is what your district doing now different from what you did prior to NCLB?

18. Who are the primary providers of assistance?

19. How does the district evaluate the relationships between schools and any of these programs and providers?
20. What funding does the state provide to your district to pay for outside support for elementary schools? What district funds are available for individual elementary schools to collaborate with other outside assistors?

21. What consequences does the State’s accountability system have for your district and its elementary schools? Has this changed over the last three years? In what ways?

22. How has your staffing changed since NCLB? Why were changes, if any, made?

23. How has NCLB redefined the district’s relationship with elementary schools? The District’s relationship with the State?

24. How has this changed over the last few years or do you see it changing currently? Why?
Questions for individual in charge of curriculum and instruction

1. How long have you been in this position?

2. What was your previous position/experience?

3. What are your responsibilities as (insert position title here)?

4. What do you see as the district role in supporting elementary schools?

5. What is your office’s role in supporting elementary schools?

6. How has this role changed over the last 3 to 5 years? Why?

7. How does the district’s role differ with regard to elementary schools X and Y? Why?

8. How would you describe the relationship between the District and the State? How has this changed over the last few years or do you see it changing currently? Why?

9. What priority do issues of elementary school curriculum and instruction receive at the District level?

10. What are the District’s goals for its elementary school ELA curriculum? For how long have these been District goals?

11. How does this fit into the District’s overall goals?

12. What are the major ELA curricular initiatives currently underway in the elementary schools? (Probe on specific ELA initiatives; content, delivery, evaluation methods.)

13. Why did you choose these curricula?

14. How do these initiatives differ for different elementary schools in the District? If so, why?
15. What kinds of changes have been made in your elementary school ELA curricula over the last five years? Why did you make these changes?

16. How are the district’s curricular initiatives connected to other initiatives going on in elementary schools?

17. How is what your district doing now different from what you did prior to NCLB?

18. What challenges do you face in implementing the curricular initiatives? (Probes: Financial resources? Human resources? Other?)

19. Would you describe the district’s vision of what good ELA instruction looks like or do you have a written document where it is described? May I have a copy?

20. How is the elementary school teachers’ instructional methods evaluated?

21. What programs or resources does the District offer or provide to help elementary schools to improve instruction in ELA? Why did you choose these programs/resources?

22. How are the programs tailored to each elementary school’s context and performance? Who does this?

23. What determines if participation in these programs is mandatory or voluntary?

24. If voluntary, what are the incentives for participation? Do these incentives work well? For both newer and experienced teachers?

25. What programs do you offer specifically targeted to under-achieving elementary schools?

26. What opportunities do elementary school teachers have to talk to other teachers about instruction? Co-teach? Do teachers have the chance to see other teachers
model teaching in their classrooms? If yes, how frequently does this happen?

Who is responsible for making it happen?

27. What instructional assistance is available to your district from other organizations/institutions/companies that aim to help elementary schools improve English instruction? What about work being done by or with local foundations, teacher networks, university partnerships, and/or grassroots efforts?

28. How did you choose the curricular approach or instructional program mentioned above (interviewer should focus on one program of interest)? Or was it chosen for you? (If so, by whom?)

29. Who did you consult?

30. What resources did the District draw upon?

31. What were the criteria for the final choice?

32. Who made the final decision to select the program you described above?

33. How typical was the decision-making process you just described?

34. What data do you look at when reviewing the district’s needs with regard to elementary school curriculum and instruction? State tests? Local tests? Performance evaluations? Other indicators?

35. What (other) consequences has the State’s accountability system had for both your elementary school ELA curriculum and instructional methods? Has this changed over the last three to five years? Probe: Would you say that the State accountability system has changed the level of attention given to matters of elementary school curriculum and instruction at the district level?

36. How has the accountability pressure defined or changed your role?
Questions for individual in charge of professional development

1. How long have you been in this job?

2. What is your previous position/experience?

3. What are your responsibilities as (insert position title here)?

4. What do you see as the District role in supporting elementary schools?

5. Has this role changed over the last 3 to 5 years? How and why?

6. Does the District’s role differ with regard to elementary schools X and Y? If so, how and why? (If we are only looking at one elementary school in the District, ask if the one we are looking at has a different relationship than the others.)

7. How would you describe the relationship between the District and the State? Has this changed over the last few years or do you see it changing currently? Why?

8. What are the District’s goals for its professional development program for elementary schools? For how long have these been District goals?

9. How does this fit into the District’s overall goals?

10. What are the challenges in meeting these goals? (Probes: financial resources: human resources? other?)

11. Do these goals and challenges differ for different elementary schools in the District?

12. Who is primarily responsible for deciding what professional development opportunities are available to elementary schools and their teachers?

13. How much of the decision is left to individual teachers or schools?

14. How much does the District choose and/or coordinate professional development offerings at the elementary school level?
15. Why do you assign responsibility in this way?

16. Does the District monitor the professional development that is being undertaken or offered? Does it require or encourage schools to use PD resources in certain ways?

17. What data do you look at in planning the District’s professional development program for elementary schools? (Probe on: State tests? Local tests? Performance evaluations? Other indicators?)

18. Who are the primary providers of professional development programs and resources to elementary schools within the District? Does this include professional development providers that may not be District employees?

19. What are the major professional development strategies or practices that you use with elementary school staff? (Probe on specific programs and initiatives.)

20. What content areas are covered? Why?

21. How is the content delivered?

22. Who is involved?

23. How is the program evaluated?

24. Are the programs tailored to an individual school’s context and performance or are they geared toward elementary schools more generally? How is this done?

25. Are these PD programs mandatory or voluntary?

26. If mandatory, who makes these requirements?

27. If voluntary, what are the incentives for participation? Do these incentives work well? For both newer and more experienced teachers?
28. How is your professional development strategy connected to other school, District
or State initiatives in elementary schools?

29. Where do the resources for District-based PD programs come from? The
resources for school-based programs? (Probe on: State allotment or special
programs, Title I, other federal programs, private initiatives, etc.)

30. Do you have funds available for individual elementary schools to partner with
other outside assistors?

31. Are there programs (sponsored by State, District, or outside entity) targeted
specifically at providing professional development services in low-performing
elementary schools? Please describe them. How does an elementary school
become eligible for or involved in any of these intervention programs?

32. In your opinion, what kind(s) of PD do elementary school teachers most need to
achieve State and District goals in ELA?

33. Have professional development programs for your elementary schools changed
over the last five years. If so, how? Why did you make these changes?

34. How did the District choose the [identify one professional development provider
or strategy] that we just discussed?

35. What options were considered?

36. Who did you consult?

37. What resources did the District draw upon?

38. What were the criteria for the final choice?

39. Who made the final decision to select the program you described above?
40. How typical was the decision-making process you just described for choosing PD providers or strategies?

41. What consequences has the State’s accountability system had for your professional development program? Has this changed over the last three years?

42. Has the accountability pressure defined or changed your role? The District’s relationship with elementary schools? With the State?

Questions for individual in charge of data use

1. What is your previous position/experience?

2. What are your responsibilities as (insert position title here)?

3. What do you see as the District role in supporting elementary schools?

4. What is your office’s role in supporting elementary schools?

5. Has this role changed over the last 3 to 5 years? How and why?

6. Does the District’s role differ with regard to elementary schools X and Y? If so, how and why? (If we are only looking at one elementary school in the District, ask if the one we are looking at has a different relationship than the others.)

7. How would you describe the relationship between the District and the State? Has this changed over the last few years or do you see it changing currently? Why?

8. Please describe the District’s accountability system. (Be clear about the measures being used in the system and consequences for students, teachers, principals/administrators, and schools.)

9. How, if at all, does this differ from the State’s accountability system?

10. What are the elements of the District’s accountability system that particularly affect elementary school? (targets, testing, measures, consequences)
11. How are “low-performing” schools identified by the State? Are any elementary schools in this District so identified? Does the District have a different system for identifying low performing schools? What is the difference in systems for identifying low-performing elementary schools?

12. What data on elementary schools (Probe for data at the student, teacher, and school levels) do you collect for your internal use? What data do you receive from the State? What data do you report publicly? (Probes: standardized test scores, graduation rates, college enrollment, attendance, disciplinary issues, dropouts, retentions, course-taking, grades, class size, teacher evaluation measures, etc.)

13. What are your main uses for the collection and analysis of such data? (Probes: Planning professional development or student curriculum; evaluating instructional practice; school improvement planning; identifying students in need of special support?)

14. How are these uses of data connected to other initiatives going on in elementary schools?

15. How are these uses connected to State, District or school goals?

16. What are the challenges in meeting these goals? (Probes: financial resources? human resources? other?)

17. Do you receive any outside support (State or other providers) in interpreting and using data? Does the State provide any funding or programs to your District to pay for or facilitate research and date use?

18. What data is provided to elementary schools?
19. Is data provided to all elementary schools in the same way or is it tailored to each school? How is this done?

20. What programs or resources does the District offer or provide to help elementary schools to interpret the data that they receive from State and District sources? Or to develop their own indicators and data collection system?

21. How do you see elementary schools making use of the State and local data?

22. Do you see a role for such data in instructional improvement? If so, what is it?

23. Have there been changes in the numbers and/or types of assessments that the District administers in elementary schools? What are these changes and why were they made? Probe on State policy changes as a possible cause.)

24. Has accountability pressure caused you to generate additional data beyond what the State requires or provides? What types?

25. What data would you like to have that you do not currently either receive or collect?

26. What consequences has the State accountability system had for how you use data that you generate or that the State generates? Has this changed over the last three years?

27. Has the accountability pressure defined or changed the District’s relationship with elementary schools? With the State?

Questions for other District administrators

1. I have reviewed some basic demographic and descriptive information about your District, but can you tell me some important things I should know about this District in order to have a deeper understanding of it?
2. How long have you been in this job?

3. What is your previous position/experience?

4. What are your responsibilities as (insert position title here)?

5. What do you see as the District role in supporting elementary schools?

6. What is your office’s role in supporting elementary schools?

7. Has this role changed over the last 3 to 5 years? How and why?

8. Does the District’s role differ with regard to elementary schools X and Y? If so, how and why? (If we are only looking at one elementary school in the District, ask if the one we are looking at has a different relationship than the others)

9. How would you describe the relationship between the District and the State? Has this changed over the last few years or do you see it changing currently? Why?

10. Give me a thumbnail description of the changes that have been made in elementary schools over the last five years. Why were these changes made?

11. If I were a principal of an elementary school in this District striving to improve performance, what role would the District play in my life?

12. If I were a department head in this District…?

13. If I were a teacher in this District…?

14. What are the District’s specific goals for elementary schools?

15. How does this fit into the District’s overall goals?

16. What are the challenges in meeting these goals? (Probes: financial resources? Human resources? Other?)

17. Do these goals and challenges differ for different elementary schools in the District?
18. What are the major strategies that the District is adopting or using to improve student achievement in its elementary schools? (Probe on specific programs and initiatives.)

19. What programs or resources does the District offer or provide to help elementary schools improve instruction in ELA? Do you offer programs specifically targeted to underachieving schools or students?

20. What is the District strategy to deal with students who do not meet the graduation requirements or other benchmarks that the District has established? Are there programs, interventions, or assistance for such students along the way?

21. Who are the primary external providers of assistance to help your elementary school teachers improve their instruction in ELA? Probes: What other programs or resources are available to your District to help elementary schools reach their goals in these areas? What about work being done by or with local foundations, teacher networks, university partnerships and/or grassroots efforts?

22. Does the State provide any funding to your District to pay for outside support for elementary schools? Do you have funds available for individual elementary schools to partner with other outside assistors?

23. You mentioned (choose one instructional program) as an elementary school instructional initiative. Tell me the details of how this program was chosen.

24. What options were considered?

25. Who did you consult?

26. What resources did the District draw upon?

27. What were the criteria for the final choice?
28. Who made the final decision to select the program you described above?

29. How typical was the decision-making process you just described?

30. What data does the District look at to identify elementary school needs? (Probes: standardized test scores, graduation rates, college enrollment, attendance, disciplinary issues, dropouts, retentions, course-taking, grades, class size, teacher evaluation measures, etc.)

31. What consequences does the State’s accountability system have for your District and its elementary schools? Has this changed over the last three years? In what ways?

32. What is your general opinion about the system and its design? Has the system redefined or changed your role? The District’s relationship with elementary schools? With the State?
Appendix D

Committee of Experts

Ms. Jane Bullowa, Assistant Superintendent for Instruction – Ulster Board of Cooperative Services (BOCES)

Ms. Marystephanie Corsones, Director of Special Services – Kingston City Schools

Ms. Greer Fischer, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction – Kingston City Schools

Dr. Peter Litchka, Superintendent – North Salem School District

Dr. Elliot Weinbaum – Center for Policy Review in Education (CPRE) – University of Philadelphia
Appendix E

Job Description

Title: DIRECTOR OF ELEMENTARY EDUCATION

Qualifications: Administrative certification as School District Administrator.
Master's degree with course work in curriculum and supervision.
At least three years experience in supervision at the elementary level.
Technology skills at the proficient level.
Experience in data analysis and reporting.
Exceptional communication skills.

Reports To: Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction.

Supervises: MST Coordinator
Humanities Coordinator

Goals:
To ensure that each elementary school student is provided with educational experiences that assists them in becoming competent and confident learners.

To facilitate the process of managing and communicating data (District LEAP coordinator) for the purpose of evaluating instruction programs as they relate to improved student performance.

To facilitate at the elementary level the coordination of State, District, and building initiatives, including, but not limited to Middle States and CDEP.

To assist in the supervision of K-6 curriculum and instruction.

Performance Responsibilities:

1. Provide leadership in curriculum development and instructional improvement activities in the elementary schools.

2. Participate in selection, assignment, evaluation and scheduling, where necessary, of elementary administrative and teaching personnel.

3. Assist the elementary principals in producing an effective elementary program and collaborate in setting the agenda for elementary and administrative cabinet meetings.

4. Keep the assistant superintendent for curriculum & instruction, superintendent, and Board of Education informed concerning major developments in the areas of NYS initiatives, Standards and assessment implementation, such as character education, CDOS, and all major developments in the elementary school programs through monthly reports.

5. Contribute to and support the implementation of staff development plans and initiatives, including but not limited to CSPD, PDP, with the goal of instituting instructional best practice.

6. Provide leadership in developing transition planning at primary, intermediate, and middle levels.

7. Support the principal in his/her role of implementing the District’s AIS Plan.
8. Promote the integration of CDOS and character education into all content areas.

9. Maintain high expectations for all students to demonstrate growth.

10. Accept responsibility as a member of the administrative team and promote the overall effectiveness of the team management concept including collaboration with parent and community representatives.

11. Participate actively in professional organizations and attend various workshops, conferences, and seminars to continue professional growth.

12. Serve on committees and fulfill other responsibilities or duties as assigned by the Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction to enhance the curricular excellence of the District.

13. Attend and participate in extracurricular, curricular and patron/community sponsored activities scheduled outside the school day.


15. Collaborate and communicate with the Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction with all of the above.

16. Perform other duties, tasks and responsibilities assigned by the superintendent.
Appendix F

Literacy Position Statement
Small City School District W
Balanced Literacy, the Four Blocks Framework & Harcourt Trophies

History

In December 2003, after a lengthy process of shared decision-making, the K-2 classroom teachers in the Small City School District W selected, by a majority vote, Harcourt Trophies as the reading series for the District. As per our Board policy, we made a recommendation to the Trustees of the Board of Education in January 2004, to adopt this series for use effective September 2004.

District Position Statement

It is the position of the Small City School District W that all regular education and special education teachers implement a balanced literacy approach to teach reading using the Harcourt Series as their primary literacy instruction. This is non-negotiable. Given the 26% student mobility rate and the size of this District, it is imperative that all students have a consistent curriculum and common language. Recognizing that no single instructional method works for all students at all times, teachers should use their expertise to differentiate the curriculum and help students who may need additional reading support.
Frequently Asked Questions

What is the relationship between the Balanced Literacy Framework, Four Blocks and Harcourt Trophies? What drives classroom instruction, the framework or the basal? How should the framework and the basal materials work together?

- **Four Blocks is an accepted “framework”** for providing a balanced literacy program. However, *teachers must use the Harcourt materials, scope and sequence.*

- **Ongoing Assessment and Student Needs Drive Instruction:** The District approved Harcourt Trophies because it contains the elements of the Small City School District W Balanced Literacy Framework. However, balanced literacy instruction only occurs when the teacher, using running records and other ongoing assessments, matches material and instruction to the individual needs of students.
  
  *Balanced Literacy does not occur if the teacher starts on page one of the basal and just works through towards the end.*

- **Phonics and Phonemic Awareness are Foundational to Early Instruction:** The Balanced Literacy Framework asks K-2 teachers to teach these components daily based upon the assessed needs of students. The Harcourt Trophies program contains a complete pre-set scope and sequence of phonics that teachers should draw upon and use as a resource. However, *teaching the entire scope and sequence of phonics, whether students need the whole sequence or not, is not balanced literacy instruction.*
• **Shared Reading and Guided Reading are the Basis of Reading TO and Reading WITH Children:** Teachers can and should use Harcourt Trophies selections for shared reading. Shared reading is whole group instruction, and the text may be above the student's instructional level. Teachers should teach comprehension strategies, phonics, chunking, vocabulary, concepts of print, and other reading strategies during shared reading. Guided reading follows shared reading. Based on assessment, the teacher forms flexible groups of 6-7 students whose instructional levels or needs are similar. Using leveled readers, the teacher “guides” the group in applying the appropriate reading skills and strategies. As reading skills improve, students move through higher levels of text. The Harcourt Trophies Library and theme paperbacks are leveled text. Teachers should use them for guided reading, along with the guided reading library (i.e., Rigby, Sunshine, etc.) in existence in their buildings. *If the teacher only uses basal text selections and whole-group instruction, guided reading is not happening and an important component of balanced literacy instruction is missing.*

• **Literacy Centers and Independent Study Reinforce Classroom Instruction:** Centers allow students to independently practice skills learned during word work, shared and guided reading and writers' workshop. The Harcourt Trophies program provides suggestions for centers and independent study at the end of each selection and in the practice book, which are helpful resources. However, *the*
best centers and independent activities are those created by teachers based upon real needs of students. If the teacher only uses the practice book for centers or independent study, they may not be meeting the individual student needs and instruction is not balanced.

- **Writing Workshop and Four Squares Writing Provides the Structure and Management for learning the Writing Process**: The routine includes a mini-lesson that teaches the writing craft, or specific writing skills and strategies. Students then choose their own writing topics and produce text. Teachers individualize writing instruction through one-on-one writing conferences during workshop time. To help build a “consistent language,” all teachers should use the supplied rubrics and the language of 6-Traits Writing © to help students edit and “revise” their drafts. At the end of workshop time, students regroup to share written work. The Harcourt Trophies program gives teachers ideas and helpful tips for teaching the different modes of writing and improving writing skills. However, the teacher must organize and carry out the writing instruction. *If students are to become proficient in writing, teachers must provide writing instruction and daily opportunities for students to write.*

**Belief Statements**

K-2 children need a balanced literacy program in order to *learn to read*. Grades 3-6 need a balanced literacy program *in order to read to learn.*
All children need guided reading groups. K-2 children need guided reading groups in order to develop strategies and become independent learners. Children who are reading below grade level require guided reading groups to fill in the missing skills and strategies that hinder them from being independent learners. Children who are on or above grade level to further develop their existing strategies and self-extending literacy systems.

All children require explicit, systematic, and scaffolded instruction that will move them toward independence.

All children require a minimum of 60-90 minutes of uninterrupted literacy instruction per day. Teachers can accomplish this through use of an integrated curriculum.

Balanced Literacy Program Essentials

Structures

Whole Group
- Read Aloud and Shared Reading
- Shared and Interactive Writing

Small Group
- Guided Reading and Writing
- Literacy Centers

One on One
- Independent Reading and Writing
- Literacy Centers

Teacher Support
Reading

Read Aloud
Shared Reading
Guided Reading
Independent Reading
Self-Extended System (i.e., sustained silent reading, Accelerated Reading, etc.)

Writing

Shared Writing
Interactive Writing
Guided Writing
Independent Writing
Self-Extending System (i.e., Six Traits Writing, Writer’s Workshop, Four Square, etc.)

Modeling of Reading and Writing

Teacher to Student
Explicit-Modeling of reading and writing
Contextualized-Authentic
Systematic-Well Planned

Student to Student
Metacognitive
Self-Monitoring
Fluent Reader and Writer

Independent

**Recommended Readings**


Harcourt Trophies. *Scientific Research Base*.


Appendix G

District W Report Cards
**Figure 17.** Small City District W's old report card.

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<tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPENDING</td>
<td>Assigned Words</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Written Work</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>MATHEMATICS</td>
<td>Computation</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Problem Solving</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MARKING PERIOD</th>
<th>SOCIAL ATTITUDES AND WORK HABITS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SKILLS</td>
<td>Accepts Responsibility</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Practices Self Control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Completes Assignments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Follows Directions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Works Independently</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SPECIAL AREAS</th>
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<tr>
<td>ART</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIBRARY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PHYSICAL EDUCATION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VOCAL MUSIC</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OTHER EDUCATIONAL SERVICES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>FIRST PERIOD</th>
<th>SECOND PERIOD</th>
<th>THIRD PERIOD</th>
<th>FOURTH PERIOD</th>
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222
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SCHOOL</th>
<th>TEACHER</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**KEY**
- E: Excellent
- S: Satisfactory
- I: Improved
- U: Unsatisfactory
- N: Not assessed at this time

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BEHAVIOR</th>
<th>01</th>
<th>02</th>
<th>03</th>
<th>04</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Consistently meets expectations with minimal assistance.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Occasionally meets expectations with minimal assistance.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Rarely meets expectations with minimal assistance.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Not assessed at this time.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

| FIGURE 18. Small City District W's current report card. |
Small Rural District T Literacy Audit External Review (Update 2005)  
May 19 & 20, 2003

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Findings</th>
<th>District T Primary School</th>
<th>District T Intermediate School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. There is not a consistent level of high quality instruction taking</td>
<td>All students participate in an uninterrupted 90 minute literacy block. All teachers must</td>
<td>A LINKS Leadership Team worked last year to identify research-based instructional strategies and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>place. A variety of strategies are being employed in pockets of places</td>
<td>teach all of the components of effective literacy within the block. Professional development</td>
<td>developed materials for a Teacher Resource Center at the Intermediate School. A list of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>with varying degrees of success. A common philosophy was not apparent.</td>
<td>including in-house teacher presentations and observations have taken place. A team of</td>
<td>professional books available in the center was compiled and distributed, as was a list of “human</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The district must develop a common understanding of the literacy</td>
<td>teachers is going to Sidney to observe the 100 Book Challenge program and the building</td>
<td>resources” with strengths in particular strategy areas. Teaching masters were compiled into</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>attributes among all staff members, in all subject areas, in order to</td>
<td>principal is going to present the program to the whole faculty. A teacher from B-G will</td>
<td>labeled binders and teachers were given instructional strategy folders. Additional professional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>provide a more rigorous and challenging curriculum that will meet the</td>
<td>present the Sitton Spelling Method to the faculty.</td>
<td>books were purchased as recommended by the committee.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>needs of our learners.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Staff members must use data for both student improvement and program</td>
<td>All students are assessed 4 times per year on letter and sound recognition, sight words,</td>
<td>Writing portfolios and expectations are in place. Math benchmarks have been developed. All</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>review.</td>
<td>concepts of print, decoding and comprehension.</td>
<td>students were given the Stanford Diagnostic Reading Assessment. The Remedial Teachers worked</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>with their teams to discuss the information from the Stanford and to use it to develop the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>schedule and programs for academic intervention. Grade level meetings have included review of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>student work and math benchmark analysis as agenda items. The criteria for math benchmark</td>
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<tr>
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<td>questions was determined for use in error coding student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Findings</td>
<td>District T Primary School</td>
<td>District T Intermediate School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>work following the administration of the benchmark assessments. The information following each benchmark assessment will be used to determine academic intervention needs of individual students. At the end of the year, we will review the benchmark assessments.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. A variety of reading strategies are being used in a variety of places. A consistent approach needs to be developed. A determination of required strategies at each grade level must be developed and expected.</td>
<td>Benchmarks have been established for all grade levels. AIS services are based on the benchmarks.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. In order for us to determine how good is good enough for our students, benchmark assessments need to be developed in Grades 4-8.</td>
<td>Not applicable.</td>
<td>Writing folders with student work and Options reading assessments are currently being used. Standard rubrics identify the criteria for writing at each level.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. As some of our learners are not successful, we need to develop a pyramid of interventions that will ensure the success of all.</td>
<td>We move from classroom strategies, to reading teacher support, to special education services. SAT meetings are regularly held to assist teachers with pre-referral strategies.</td>
<td>A chart has been developed for grades 4-8.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Numerous models of parallel tasks need to be distributed and used on a daily basis.</td>
<td>Models have been developed and distributed. New tasks are regularly developed and distributed.</td>
<td>Has not yet been tackled.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Findings</td>
<td>District T Primary School</td>
<td>District T Intermediate School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. A balanced literacy program should be defined and expected.</td>
<td>See attached format for 90 minute block.</td>
<td>Has not yet been tackled.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Writing expectations need to be developed and used in all subject area. The quality, variety, length and number of written pieces should be addressed. The writing process and timed writing process should be defined.</td>
<td>Our rubrics are developed. We have included anchor papers as well. Our required portfolio pieces are established for each grade level.</td>
<td>See number 4.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Books taught at each grade level 3-6 should be identified and not duplicated.</td>
<td>We have not done anything with this yet.</td>
<td>This has not formally been pulled together.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Grade level expectations and benchmark assessments should be developed.</td>
<td>This is complete at the Primary School. We use Joetta Beaver, Options, and Scholastic Literacy Place assessments.</td>
<td>See number 4.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. All classrooms should be literacy rich with a variety of texts beyond textbooks and books.</td>
<td>We have purchased leveled texts for each classroom.</td>
<td>This has not been formally addressed. There is inconsistency across classrooms.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Consistent portfolio pieces should be identified.</td>
<td>This is complete.</td>
<td>This has been done. See number 4.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Develop a district-wide approach to vocabulary teaching.</td>
<td>We have not done this yet.</td>
<td>This has not been done.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Differentiated instruction needs to be implemented.</td>
<td>Many teachers have attended the BOCES training. We continue to develop our skills in this area.</td>
<td>This is occurring inconsistently across classrooms.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Findings</td>
<td>District T Primary School</td>
<td>District T Intermediate School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. There are relatively few clear expectations for our teaching staff in terms of materials to be used. Benchmarks for student growth, strategies to be employed, or specific work to be completed by students. There is a tremendous amount of work going on, but it lacks focus and alignment between buildings. District standards and expectations have not been identified and communicated to all teachers, in all grade levels, and in all subject areas. This work is a critical next step.</td>
<td>We have had minimal opportunities to work with staff in other buildings to develop our literacy program in these areas.</td>
<td>We need to make progress in this area, particularly at transition points.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. The district needs to continue to use data to identify skills, strategies, and services needed for students.</td>
<td>We are looking at the 100 Book Challenge and Sitton spelling. We will continue to explore options based on our data and best practices.</td>
<td>This is occurring and needs to continue with refinement. More ongoing error coding of student work needs to occur systemically.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. We need to continue our data analysis, as was previously done in 8th grade with our 4th grade data.</td>
<td>Now we will analyze the 3rd grade results.</td>
<td>I think that this has been happening. I am not sure what it refers to.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. We need to acknowledge changes in the area of Special Education on the State ELA assessments and determine potential impact.</td>
<td>Not applicable yet.</td>
<td>Adjustments are being made.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Students need to use data to improve performance.</td>
<td>Not yet at Gibson.</td>
<td>We need to determine when and how to do this. It is occurring sporadically.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix I

Sample Letters
December 14, 2004

Elliot H. Weinbaum, Ph.D.  
c/o Consortium for Policy Research in Education  
3440 Marker Street, Suite 560  
Philadelphia PA 19104

Dr. Weinbaum:

I am a full-time doctoral student in the Executive Ed.D. Program within the College of Education, Leadership, Management and Policy at Seton Hall University. I am also the Director of Elementary Education in the Kingston City School District. This is a small city school district in upstate New York.

I recently read your dissertation, entitled, *A Tale of Two Systems: School Districts and State Accountability Policies (North Carolina and Pennsylvania)*. I am currently working on my dissertation proposal and I am writing you to request your permission to adapt the questionnaire that appears in your dissertation. I am planning on looking at the response of Central Office to the accountability measures imposed by the No Child Left Behind Legislation.

Please feel free to contact me should you have any questions or if I may provide further information. You may reach me at (845) 943-3084. Thank you in advance.

Sincerely,

Paula C. Childs

Paula C. Childs,  
SHU Student  
childspa@shu.edu
September 8, 2005

Dear Superintendent,

I am a full-time doctoral student in the Executive Ed.D. program within the College of Education, Leadership, Management and Policy at Seton Hall University. I am currently preparing to do a comparative study of the impact of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation on central office administrators.

Many districts around the country are labeled in need of improvement under NCLB. My purpose with this study is to look at the different corrective actions taken by selected district-level administrators in New York State in response to the accountability measures imposed by NCLB. My research looks specifically at corrective actions taken at the district level to improve the students’ elementary English language arts achievement.

Your participation in this study will require approximately one (1) hour.

If you choose to participate in the study, your involvement will include participation in an open-ended interview. The questions will focus on NCLB and corrective actions taken to improve ELA scores. Sample questions include the following:

- “What are the major strategies that the district is adopting or using to improve ELA student achievement in its elementary schools?”
- “What programs or resources does the district offer or provide to help elementary schools improve instruction in ELA?”
- “What programs do you offer specifically targeted to underachieving schools or students?”
- “How is what your district doing now different from what you did prior to NCLB?”

Participation in this study is voluntary. Participants may opt out before and during the interview. There is no penalty if an individual decides not to participate and no one will know if a participant chooses to drop out of the study.

The anonymity of each subject will be maintained. Each participant will be identified with a code. Only their codes, not their names, will be placed on transcripts and recordings of interviews. The researcher will change all names to protect the identity of the district and personnel.

All data, recordings and transcripts will be kept in a locked cabinet in the researcher’s office. The data will remain in the locked cabinet for a period of no less than three years after the completion of the study before being destroyed.

Sincerely,

Paula C. Childs

Paula C. Childs,
Researcher, Seton Hall University
childspa@shu.edu
Appendix J

Permissions
September 9, 2005

Ms. Paula C. Childs  
c/o Seton Hall University  
400 South Orange Ave.  
South Orange, NJ 07079

Dear Ms. Childs:

You have permission to conduct your study, *A Comparative Study on the Ways in Which Selected New York State District Administrators in Districts in Need of Improvement Respond to the No Child Left Behind Act*, if approved by IRB in this district. I wish you the best!

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Gerard O'Sullivan  
Superintendent
September 21, 2005

Paula Childs
60 Magic Drive
Kingston, NY 12401

Dear Ms Childs,

The Seton Hall University Institutional Review Board has reviewed and approved as submitted under expedited review your research proposal entitled “A Comparative Study of the Ways in Which Selected New York State District Administrators in Districts in Need of Improvement Respond to the No Child Left Behind Act”. The IRB reserves the right to recall the proposal at any time for full review.

Enclosed for your records are the signed Request for Approval form and the stamped original Consent Form. Make copies only of this stamped Consent Form.

The Institutional Review Board approval of your research is valid for a one-year period from the date of this letter. During this time, any changes to the research protocol must be reviewed and approved by the IRB prior to their implementation.

According to federal regulations, continuing review of already approved research is mandated to take place at least 12 months after this initial approval. You will receive communication from the IRB Office for this several months before the anniversary date of your initial approval.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Mary F. Ruzicka, Ph.D.
Professor
Director, Institutional Review Board

cc Dr. Daniel Guimont

Office of Institutional Review Board
Presidents Hall
Tel: 973.313.6314 • Fax: 973.372.2978
400 South Orange Avenue • South Orange, New Jersey 07079-2641

ENRICHING THE MIND, THE HEART AND THE SPIRIT
Paula-
You have my permission to adapt my interview protocols for use in your own dissertation research, provided the origin of those protocols is appropriately cited in your text, your appendices, and your bibliography or reference list. This email can serve as documentation of my permission. Should you need something in the mail, please let me know.

Best,
Elliot.

Childs Paula wrote:
Good Morning Elliot,

I'm working on gathering my paperwork for the IRB process. Would you please send me a written response granting me permission to use your interview protocols. Thanks for EVERYTHING you've done!

Sincerely,
Paula C. Childs
Seton Hall Student
Kingston City Schools
60 Crown St.
Kingston, NY 12401
(845) 943-3084
(845) 532-2549 (cell)

--
Elliot H. Weinbaum, Ph.D.
Researcher
University of Pennsylvania
Consortium for Policy Research in Education (CPRE)
3440 Market Street, Suite 560
Philadelphia, PA 19104
Phone: 215-573-0700 extension 247
Fax: 215-573-7914
Email: elliotw@gse.upenn.edu