

A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF THE PERCEIVED STRESS LEVELS OF
PRINCIPALS IN THE *NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND* ERA

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William F. Carlin

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Examining Committee Members:

Corrinne Caldwell, Advisory Chair, Educational Administration
James Earl Davis, Educational Administration
Joan Shapiro, Educational Administration
Steven Jay Gross, Educational Administration
Joseph DuCette, Educational Psychology

ABSTRACT**A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF THE PERCIEVED STRESS LEVELS OF
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Major Advisor: Dr. Corrinne Caldwell

This case study examined the extent to which the No Child Left Behind mandate has contributed to principal stress, specifically in middle schools that have achieved annual yearly progress through the use of confidence intervals when measuring particular sub-groups. A secondary question relating to how principals are coping with the law from an academic/personal viewpoint in the face of NCLB stressors was also addressed. The primary data source was interviews with ten current principals from urban, suburban and rural school districts in the surrounding Philadelphia area. Review of data sources provided by the principals, use of public educational databases as well as observations were used to study this phenomenon. The NCLB statute and its myriad consequences for schools that do not make AYP have created a more stressful, testing- driven environment for all stakeholders. Principals, teachers, parents and most importantly, students have all been affected by this statute. Schools that are classified as Corrective Action 1 & 2 because of sub-group scores continue to rise in Southeastern Pennsylvania; nowhere is this more dramatic than at the secondary schools level. Principals in these buildings face

stiff pressure from internal and external forces. Nationally, recent research has borne out an increase in principal turnover across the country over the past 5 years. According to the statute, every student that attends public school in the United States will be proficient in math and reading, regardless of sub-group, by 2014. The purpose of this qualitative study was to illuminate an area of research pertaining to principals of schools whose subgroups achieved AYP through the use of a confidence interval, and to collect effective instructional data (interventions) that could theoretically help student sub-groups achieve AYP.

There is also an understanding among principals that if they do not meet their AYP goal each year, eventually they can be removed from their leadership positions. This sanction does not take into effect a school's overall score, but is reflective of all its subgroups. Results from this study show that principals, although aware of the law and its sanctions, chose to focus on designing positive interventions that help all students achieve, while at the same time offering instructional supports to their respective staffs. The principals agreed that the NCLB law was good for public education, but stated that sub-group inclusion was unfair to the students it is designed to protect. All principals reported a moderate level of stress connected with the implementation of the statute, but not enough for them to consider leaving their jobs for another occupation. The premise that principals worried about losing their jobs as a result of AYP failure was refuted in this study. All principals reported major changes at their schools in curriculum delivery, interventions for sub-groups, and the use of data assessment systems to drive instruction. An emerging theme from this study is the concept that the NCLB statute over the past 5 years has become the "Great Equalizer" between urban and suburban districts. As more

suburban schools fall under NCLB sanctions, they no longer can dismiss AYP failures as an urban phenomenon, but actually look to partner with urban schools in order to create effective instructional programs for their students.

The research about the impact of the NCLB law on principal stress remains inconclusive. As the law continues to move toward 2014, barring any dramatic change in the law, all public schools in the United States will be under some type of corrective action. There is a large research gap re: how principals will survive in that particular environment. This study has started to address that gap by focusing on what schools do when they are an under-performing sub-group away from NCLB sanctions. This study also begins to document the changes that have been occurring in schools as a result of NCLB along with principal perceptions of stress since its advent in 2002.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to Vera, Liam Lash, Owen C, Mom, John, Kate, Anastasia and Nicholas. It would not have been possible without your love, support and patience- simply, Thank You, Thank You, Thank You.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

This study describes a plan that studied the perceived stress levels of middle school principals in southeastern Pennsylvania in relation to the No Child Left Behind Statute. This case study used qualitative methods to collect and analyze interview data from principals. Additionally, relevant documents were analyzed in order to provide context to the study. Chapter 1 presents a statement of the problem, purpose of the study, research questions, delimitations/limitations of the study and the theoretical basis for the study.

Statement of the Problem

With the passage of the No Child Left Behind Legislation (technically the Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Act of 1965) in January of 2002, the face of American education was changed in ways that no one could have imagined at that time. The law itself, so different than any other education law Congress had passed before, has taken the idea of the classic American school system and turn it upside down. President Bush, drawing from his positive experiences in 1991 when he used an education reform agenda during his successful run for governor of Texas, was ready to do the same on a national level (Debray, 2005). As the Bush administration created their educational agenda through 2001, it became evident that there was going to be a new approach to educational reform than any of his predecessors (Sunderman, 2005). It was also evident that there were specific requirements in this proposed legislation that had never be seen before, including how often States had to test students and what subjects

would be emphasized. The law also gave top priority to gains in scores in mathematics and reading, and funded set-asides and sanctions for thousands of schools just a few months after the law was signed (Sunderman & Kim, 2005). School districts had to give up their local autonomy when providing their own particular student assessments; NCLB requires each State to develop their own tests and administer them to every student who is eligible. Orefield (2005) stated that for the first time in American educational history, a law was passed that treated educational improvement as a regulatory process rather than an educational and professional problem.

NCLB, as it became known in the mainstream media, has become an immediate lightning rod for debate among teachers, principals, and parents. Its adherents laud its focus on accountability and mandatory yearly testing measures; its detractors lament the draconian sanctions that are supposed to occur when schools do not meet Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) requirements. With a decidedly bi-partisan approach to a domestic issue that historically was ignored, the 106th Congress created an expectation that the American educational system had never seen before: true accountability with specific consequences for schools that failed to educate their students to a specific level on state-wide standardized tests (Debray, 2005).

The main focuses of NCLB are the five components that lead to the designation of performance by each school and its accompanying district (United States Department of Education, [USDOE], 2002). All students in the United States between grades 3-8 must be tested in math, reading, writing and science. Students in grades 10-12 must be tested at least once in the same subject areas mentioned above. Every school district is required to test on a yearly basis, and each individual State must provide and administer

assessments for each of the subjects. These assessments must meet the curricular standards put forth by the US Department of Education (US DOE, 2002). In Pennsylvania, the test that is used by all school districts in the Commonwealth is called the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA).

One of the more controversial components of the NCLB accountability plan is related to the way subgroups are calculated into the final scores for each individual school. Subgroups designated in a school could be children with special needs, students who speak another language other than English, race, gender, socioeconomic status, migrant status and school (Pennsylvania Department of Education, [PADOE], 2009). A disaggregation of data among sub-groups is calculated and used as a specific measurement for AYP. AYP has several different target indicators, including attendance, graduation rate, participation rate in assessments, and actual student achievement (Decker, 2008). There are also strict calculation rules for AYP, which allow the inclusion of new student scores even if the student arrived at the school the day before testing is set to begin. Only 1% of students in a particular school district may take an alternative to the regular assessment. In Pennsylvania, students who meet a rigorous set of criteria are permitted to take the Pennsylvania Alternative System of Assessment, or PASA. English Language Learners (ELLS) who have been in the USA one year are required by law to take the entire PSSA reading assessment in English with no prompting or assistance. ELL students are also required to take the math assessment; recently a Spanish math test has been offered by the Pennsylvania Department of Education This means that a hypothetical middle school could score advanced in all tested areas but still are eligible

for NCLB sanctions if *one* subgroup/indicator does not reach the AYP threshold for that particular year.

Under NCLB guidelines, achievement is expected to improve incrementally for all school districts in the United States. (US DOE, 2002). The goal for mathematics proficiency is 56% of all students tested in 2010, 67% proficient by 2011, 78% proficient by 2012, 89% proficient by 2013, and 100% proficient by 2014. The reading goals are slightly more ambitious, with 63 % of students scoring proficient in 2010, 72% proficient in 2011, 81% proficient in 2012, 91% proficient in 2013 and 100% proficient in 2014. Schools that do not meet these federal targets are subject to a number of sanctions over a several year period. The first set of sanctions comes under the heading *school improvement*. During the first year of school improvement status, a school gets a warning from their State Department of Education. If it does not meet AYP requirements in years two and three, several sanctions are placed on the school, including the formation of a school assistance team, development of a mandatory school improvement plan, implementation of supplemental services and technical assistance. The most draconian of these sanctions from the perspective of school administrators is the offer of school choice for parents of schools that don't make AYP. Parents may transfer their child to another school in their district that has achieved their AYP goals.

The second layer of AYP sanctions comes under the heading of *corrective action*. Under corrective action I, the same strategies that are implemented in school improvement are used, but there are major changes in *leadership, curriculum or other strategies*. Under this premise, a principal of a school that does not make AYP because of low subgroup scores over a 4 year period may lose his/her job even though the school has

been proficient in all other tested areas. With the law written this way, thousands of otherwise high performing schools could theoretically lose their principals because of the subgroup rule. Corrective action II is for schools that have not met AYP for five and six years consecutively. The plan for those schools is complete reconstitution of staff, chartering, privatization and other major governance changes (Decker, 2008). A school may exit from this cycle if it meets AYP targets for two consecutive years. In order to add transparency to NCLB and AYP, federal lawmakers have mandated that each state be held accountable to the public through the publication of School Report Cards. These report cards contain all of the data from every school in a particular district and include information about proficiency/AYP rates, data by subgroup, professional qualifications of teachers, and identifies schools needing improvement (McKinney, 2008).

Pennsylvania offers three alternate scoring mechanisms when calculating AYP eligibility scores. The first alternative is the confidence interval, a statistical concept in which comparative scores of students in one sub-group are extrapolated over the same sub-group results on a statewide scale. It gives an estimated score about the particular sub-group population that took the test. The second alternative is Safe Harbor, which occurs when a school does not meet AYP but does reduce the proportion of below proficient students by 10%; this is considered a modified way to meet AYP. The third and final alternative is the Pennsylvania Performance Index, or PPI. The PPI measures the growth of each school and subgroups at its own baseline, and calculates its target each year (Decker, 2008). Dozens of schools in Pennsylvania last year achieved AYP because of one of these alternate scoring mechanisms. (Pennsylvania Adequate Yearly Progress Report, 2008).

Now, with seven years of the NCLB legislation playing itself out all over the United States, some specific educational patterns have emerged. In urban and suburban areas of our country, NCLB sanctions have been imposed on a number of k-12 schools (USDOE, 2008). A large portion of NCLB sanctions on schools failing to achieve AYP have been seen across all 50 States, including Pennsylvania, New Jersey and Delaware (USDOE, 2009). Rouse et al. (2007) found that Florida was especially stringent in its NCLB requirements and that many parents were using voucher systems to circumvent neighborhood schools, a key component of the NCLB accountability system. In cities such as Philadelphia, 30 schools have recently been targeted for complete reconstitution, and their principals removed from their positions (PBSA, 2009). As of 2007-2008, 78 % of Philadelphia public schools were under some kind of NCLB sanction (Ginsberg, 2008). Over the last three years, the imposition of NCLB sanctions has increased throughout suburban and rural areas of our country. Specifically in the Philadelphia suburbs, school districts that once were thought of as solid educational institutions have found themselves on warning and corrective action lists as mandated by NCLB (Pennsylvania Annual Yearly Progress Report, 2008). In specific cases, schools have been placed on warning/corrective action lists not because of their overall scores, but because sub-groups as identified by NCLB (Special Education, English Language Learners, or ELL, minority groups, and economically disadvantaged) did not meet the established scoring thresholds. The inclusion of sub-groups in the overall proficiency determination of a school has fundamentally changed the way principals look at instructing students. (See table 1). In the school district where I currently work there are no fewer than *11* strategies/initiatives that are being aimed at non-proficient students, and

a large number of them fall into one or more subgroups (North Penn School District Data Retreat, 2009). There are also individual schools who have achieved AYP but only because of secondary treatments such as confidence intervals and other variances that are determined by PDE. These schools are under tremendous pressure to raise scores because they are aware that they are close to being placed on the AYP corrective action list, which leads to many adverse sanctions, including removal of the educational leadership team and reconstitution of the entire school. Marzano (2003) has stated emphatically that effective leadership in schools is the most important factor for productive educational environments where children can achieve and learn to their highest potential. Principals are under enormous accountability stressors that were not present in the last 40 years of American education.

The Achievement Gap, AYP and Principal Stress

At first glance, student scores on state-wide assessments across the nation have made significant gains since the advent of NCLB in 2002. In 2007 The Center on Education Policy [CEP] found that in most states with three or more years of test data, student achievement in reading and math has risen steadily. In 9 of 13 states that had sufficient data to determine pre-and post NCLB trends, average yearly gains in test scores were greater after NCLB took effect than before (CEP, 2008). However, there is still a major concern about the achievement gap between students. These students are usually the actual representatives of the subgroups measured on the PSSA.

The Aspen Institute (2007) analyzed data from seven states (CA, OR, TX, IL, MS, NY and NC) at the middle school level and reported evidence that suggested significant gaps between white and black students, white and Hispanic students, and

students with disabilities and non—disabled students. These gaps ranged from 11 percentage points to 40, and occurred in both state assessments and the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). Another study (Harvard Educational Review , 2006) analyzing NAEP’s state level aggregate scale found that there was some narrowing of the achievement gap right after NCLB requirements were enacted, but since that time progress has slowed considerably. The study contended that if this trend was to continue, the proficiency gap between advantaged white and disadvantaged minority students would not close by 2014, and the percentage of poor and black students meeting the NAEP proficiency definition would be 25 % in reading and less than 50 % in math.

In a study using NAEP data from 28 States, Education Trust (2006) found significant gaps between white and African American students during the 2002-2006 school years in middle school reading. In the same study, the Latino – white gap widened or stayed the same in more states than it narrowed in, and 20 out of 29 states saw the gap between poor and non poor students widened. Rand Corporation (2007) found that NAEP and state assessments showed large and surprisingly similar achievement gaps between subgroups of students disaggregated by race/ethnicity and poverty status. Students with limited English proficiency and students with disabilities also trailed well behind their peers. Although there has been some positive progress recently with blacks and Hispanics outpacing their white counterparts over the long term on NAEP testing , these changes were not statistically significant. As a matter of survival from the school and student perspective, the information in these studies suggest that school districts need to find

new ways to reach these low achieving groups in order to help them learn and meet AYP by 2014.

In Pennsylvania, overall student achievement has been rising faster than the national average. In a 50- state study (CEP, 2009) Pennsylvania was the only state with rising tests scores in all three grade levels and all three achievement levels in math and reading. Student achievement has increased in every subject, at all grade levels and for all ethnic, racial and economic groups of students since 2002. Pennsylvania has also moved away from the widening of the achievement gap seen in other states, most notably narrowing the reading gap by an average of 26% for African American students, 20 % of Latino students and 23 percent for low income students. (PA DOE, 2009). Still, with all of this positive student progress, the number of schools making AYP in Pennsylvania declined for the 3rd straight year. High schools continue to make little progress, with two out of every five Pennsylvania 11th grade students below grade level in both math and reading; half of the schools did not make AYP in 2009.

In the five county Philadelphia area where this study took place, most school districts have shown a consistent pattern of meeting their AYP goals since 2002. In 2008, out of a total of 61 school districts, 54 met the criteria for AYP (PAYP Report, 2008). In these 61 school districts there are a total of 114 middle schools. This study defines middle school as 6th, 7th and 8th grade, or 7th, 8th and 9th grade, depending on the school district. Of those 116 middle schools, 93 of them made AYP. (PAAYP.net, 2009) The School District of Philadelphia had the highest rate of non- proficient middle schools, with 17 out of 22 not meeting AYP expectations. Of the middle schools in the five county area that made AYP for 2008-09, 77 of them achieved the AYP standard because of a

confidence interval, or almost 60 %. In Bucks County, out of a total of 26 middle schools, 17 made AYP because of confidence intervals. Council Rock School District, considered one of the best in the state, had 3 middle schools that needed the confidence interval treatment because of non proficiency with its special education population. Montgomery County had 12 middle schools that achieved AYP through confidence intervals, including Welsh Valley and Bala Cynwyd, the middle level flagships of Lower Merion School District. In Delaware County, Radnor Middle School had a confidence interval for its math special education population.

The subgroup population that was measured by a confidence interval varied for each county. Montgomery County had 11 middle schools that qualified under special education. Bucks County had a variety of sub groups represented, with five schools achieving proficiency through a confidence interval for black students, four for economically disadvantaged, eight schools for special education and one school for Latino. Delaware and Chester middle schools were also represented by a wide variety of subgroups making AYP because of a confidence interval, including six schools for special education students, five schools for economically disadvantaged, 4 schools for African Americans, and three for Latinos. The School District of Philadelphia was represented by Baldi, Barratt and Tilden Middle Schools in making AYP. Baldi and Barratt both had confidence intervals for its African American student population in math. (Pennsylvania Annual Yearly Progress Report, 2008) Tilden made AYP through the use of another statistical treatment called “Safe Harbor”, where a school meets AYP if they have improved the number of students who are proficient by 10 percent as

compared to the previous year. Tilden's subgroups of special education and African American students achieved met the safe harbor criteria.

This study's significance lies in the number of middle schools in the Philadelphia region that made AYP last year with the help of a statistical treatment known as the confidence interval. Without its use and application, 77 middle schools would have been put onto warning status or Corrective Action I by the State Department of Education, depending on how they did the previous year. Over 60% of the schools in the five county region relied on confidence intervals to pull them up to proficiency. This is a large percentage of schools and I believe that being a confidence interval school gives administrators a close up view of the NCLB "ledge" and the stresses that accompany it. Suburban schools all over the area, regardless of wealth, prestige or connections are on this confidence interval list, from Pennsbury all the way to Trediffryn/Easttown .All are nationally ranked school districts; all are one step away from NCLB sanctions. With middle school sub-group gaps widening in some parts of the country, and the large number of Philadelphia region schools teetering on brink of NCLB sanctions, it was now the appropriate time to delve into the minds of these middle school leaders and find out how they are dealing with an educational phenomena that threatens to not only over take their schools, but there careers as well.

Principal Responsibilities

Obviously, the complexities of the NCLB legislation have changed the role of the school principal. Valentine, et al. (2004) stated that the school leader is the main actor for implementing needed changes in his/her educational environment and is directly responsible for increasing student achievement. This responsibility of leading a school

has increased 10 fold as a result of NCLB. Fullan (2001) has stated that the pressure of educational mandates falls directly on the school leader, with all of its accompanying challenges. This is not to say that pressure in the principals' job is a new phenomenon. Stress is nothing new to the job description of a school administrator. Over the last 25 years, starting with the release of "A Nation at Risk" (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983), the United States educational system been shown in an unfavorable light when compared to other industrialized nations. This study, the first of many to present the American education system as somewhat stagnant and slipping behind other industrialized nations in math and science, had a major impact. In its conclusion the commission largely blamed poor teaching techniques and inappropriate curriculum for American students' poor performance on standardized tests (McKinney, 2008). Since then, many different types of educational reform efforts (America 2000, Goals 2000, and NAEP) have been implemented, but none with the accountability features that are the hallmark of NCLB legislation, and the accompanying stress it brings.

Even with this significant government- induced mandate, recent data has emerged that show US students are falling behind in math and science when compared to other G-8 nations, i.e., the United Kingdom, Japan and Germany (Institutes of Education Sciences, 2006A). From a higher education standpoint, The American Council on Education (2007) conducted a study that stated that the US was lowest percentage – country (G-8) in awarding university degrees in science, mathematics and engineering fields. Percentages in other countries ranged from 20 percent in Canada to 30 percent in Germany. Chisamera (2008) posits that the recent US performance on TIMSS (Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study) increased slightly, but were still much

lower than their Asian (Japan, South Korea, Malaysia) and European (Germany, Sweden, Spain) counterparts. In another TIMSS study conducted in 2006, U.S. students consistently performed below average in mathematics, ranking 9th out of the 12 participating countries (American Institutes for Research, 2006). Yet for all of this middling success, the U.S. invests 2.9 % of it's GDP on higher education- higher than any other G-8 country, spending an average of \$ 24, 100 per student at the higher education level (American Council for Education, 2007).

These mediocre scores by U.S. students have kept the drumbeat for school change at a fever pitch among politicians and educational reformers. The stress and pressure on principals complying with NCLB regulations has been enormous, and it has been reported in several areas of the country that there have been a large turnover of principals leaving the profession (Tomic & Tomic, 2008). It is my belief that the demands of AYP is causing many educational leaders to consider retiring or changing to an entirely different profession.

Over the past three years several studies (Welmers, 2005, Salazar, 2006) have tried to quantify the amount of pressure and stress that principals have felt because of NCLB mandates. These studies poignantly describe specific pressures that have been placed on schools (teachers, students and principals) and what role those stresses play in job satisfaction and retention. It is also my belief that this pressure exists in a greater fashion at schools that have made AYP because of secondary statistical treatments such as confidence intervals and the Pennsylvania Performance Index (PPI) when measuring sub-groups. My reasoning is simple- these specific schools have a large percentage (80-90 %) of their students scoring advanced and proficient on the PSSA (Carlin, 2010).

However, according to the strict calculation of AYP, if one sub-group does not make it, the whole school is placed on NCLB sanctions. This odd paradox that a school could be on Corrective Action II even though 91 % of the student body scored proficient or advanced is a frustrating concept for schools to face, but could be the norm in 2014 when all schools are expected to be 100% proficient. Even with multiple interventions in place, a school may never be completely sure that their special education or ELL sub-populations will pass the test. The pressure of making AYP has affected the principal's ability to lead; faced with the knowledge that next year's PSSA score could land his/her school on the corrective action list and all of its accompanying consequences, some principals may be opting out of the profession entirely. Salazar (2006) stated that principals thought the inclusion of sub-groups into overall proficiency scores was unfair given the circumstances that some of the sub-groups are faced with. Cognitive/social emotional delays, poverty, delayed language acquisition from ELLS are just some of the factors that are not considered relevant to the NCLB mandate (Houston, 2008).

Purpose of This Study

The overall purpose of this study was to shed light on principal stress at area schools where there has been a discernable change in environment due to NCLB regulations. Almost any school would suffice since all public schools fall under the NCLB blanket. However, I considered schools that had a few specific qualities, namely:

1. The schools must have met all of the AYP standards for that particular school year on the PSSA.

2. The school must have met all of the AYP standards and have achieved proficiency among subgroups through the use of a confidence interval or the Pennsylvania Performance Index (PPI).

I wanted to address the issue of perceived pressure generated from these NCLB mandates on the educational leaders of the school and its major provision, adequate yearly progress, or AYP. This study did not look at any other principal stressors that may have been present at the time of the interviewees. The focus was strictly NCLB stress. By asking a series of questions in interview form and examination of relevant artifacts, my plan was to determine the level of stress a principal may be feeling as result of being so close to negative NCLB sanctions. As a result of this stress, I focused on their description and assessment strategies they are using to help their schools succeed in these turbulent times. These identified strategies could be academic or psychosocial in nature. Over the last two years, I have done informal surveys about principal attitudes re: NCLB and have received responses that run the gamut from “Not caring at all” to “I should start looking for another job”. These were mostly knee jerk reactions to my queries, and could not be looked at as fully considered data. At this point in time there is a wide variety of literature stating that principals are feeling more stress, but not a lot about how principals are coping in a positive/negative/neutral way when dealing with their specific NCLB issues. I would like this study to fill in that gap in the research by interviewing these successful principals and collecting their strategies for dealing with the overwhelming stress of making AYP for every sub-group. After reviewing the literature, there is scant information about how principals are specifically dealing with the NCLB mandate (in their schools) and how it has impacted their sense of job security/satisfaction. As we get

closer and closer to 2014 and the 100% proficiency expectation of every student in America, I think this study becomes more urgent by the day. Every principal, from Radnor to Philadelphia, no matter how wealthy or poor their school district is, will be feeling the stress of NCLB sanctions. I would hope that this study would serve a purpose of illuminating the stressors of educational leaders and contribute toward a more effective solution to achieving success in the educational outcomes of the specific sub-groups in our schools.

Research Questions

There were two overarching research questions that were answered with this case study. The first question is:

How do principals describe their stress when their schools achieve Annual Yearly Progress as a result of a positive confidence interval score or Pennsylvania Performance Index with one their sub-groups, i.e., special education, English language learners, minority populations, and economically disadvantaged students.

The second question was:

What kind of strategies are these principals using in order to deal with the perceived stress of NCLB mandates and how has this impacted their job satisfaction/ job retention.

Definitions

No Child Left Behind (NCLB)- The initials for the No Child Left Behind legislation, which is the most recent reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Act of 1965; It was signed into law January 8th 2002, and is a congressional mandate that introduced

mandatory yearly testing and accountability provisions for school districts that do not meet annual yearly progress.

AYP- The initials for Adequate Yearly Progress, (AYP) the mathematical accountability measure that acts as effectiveness gauge for all American school districts and their schools. AYP is part of the NCLB. AYP is the minimum level of improvement that States, school districts and schools must achieve each year.

Confidence Interval- The statistical term that allows schools districts to escape NCLB sanctions by providing a boost to the scores of sub-group students in their schools. Specifically, if a student who belongs to a sub group, i.e., Special Education, has a test score that falls within 95 % of his or her sub-group peers in that State, than he or she would be considered proficient by PA standards. This score has historically been lower than AYP requirements (64% in reading and 56 % in math as of 2009).

Corrective Action- When a school or school district does not make yearly progress, the State will place it under a corrective action plan that includes resources to improve teaching, administration and curriculum. If a school continues to be identified as in need of improvement, then the State has increased authority to make any necessary, additional changes to ensure improvement.

Subgroups- Any group in a particular school that totals more than 40 but represents less than 10% of the overall student population. These groups are represented under AYP

categories and are as follows: Economically Disadvantaged, Special Education Students, English Language Learners (ELL) and any ethnic group that falls under the 10% threshold.

The Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA). The yearly assessment which is created by the PA Department of Education, the PSSA is given to all public school children in grades 3-8 and also 11th grade. Each student is tested in reading, math, writing and science. The results are used to determine if each school and district's met current AYP provisions.

Delimitations and Limitations of This Study

The major goal of this qualitative study is that it will be able to shine some light on an area of research that has not been addressed since the creation of the NCLB statute. I believe that the data collected added depth and provided information about this topic. It will not provide generalizations in the field of educational leadership nor will it provide definitive answers to NCLB questions. I wanted to get the best information about the case at hand, in a particular area of Philadelphia and its surrounding suburbs, without making representations about the whole principal population of Pennsylvania, or for that matter, the whole United States. It will stand alone as a valid and complete picture of this particular population at this time (Caldwell, 2009).

With that being said, there are several delimitations and limitations to this study. The first limiting factor is that the study only focused on the four counties that surround the city of Philadelphia. Currently there are 501 school districts state-wide, so the low

number of participating school districts will make any kind of generalization difficult if not impossible because of the qualitative nature of the study. Another factor is the low number of urban schools that were eligible to participate in the study. Out of the 22 schools in the city of Philadelphia that met my middle level definition (6th, 7th and 8th grade, or 7th, 8th and 9th), only 3 city-based middle schools met the AYP criteria. A very important limitation to note is that the study has no generalizability to any k-12 school in the country. This research focuses on NCLB pressures on the middle school principal and no other kind of school, elementary, high school or vocational is included. As shown in Table 1, only 31 school Districts in total met my initial criteria, leaving out large student populations in Norristown, Upper Darby and William Penn.

Table 1- School Districts that made AYP because of a Confidence Interval*** Middle Schools Only**

	Bucks County	Chester County	Montgomery County	Delaware County	Philadelphia County
# of Districts that made AYP because of a confidence interval	7	10	8	5	1
	Bensalem	Avon Grove	Colonial	Marple Newtown	Philadelphia (3 schools)
	Bristol Borough	Coatesville	Methacton	Rose Tree Media	
	Central Bucks	Downingtown	Lower Merion	SouthEast Delco	
	Centennial	Great Valley	North Penn	Springfiled	
	Council Rock	Kennent Consolidated	Springfield - Montco	Strath Haven	
	Pennnsbury	Octorara	Spring-Ford		
	Quakertown	Oxford Area	Springfield-Montco		
		Owen J. Roberts	Upper Dublin		
		Trediffryn/Easttown			
		Unionville/ Chadsford			

Another limiting factor was the different kinds of opinions and experiences of middle school administrators brought when they participated in this study. Although they are geographically close to one another, there were deep demographic and cultural differences in the make-up of their particular schools and their professional experiences. A principal in a poor school district is going to use different techniques and strategies to

help his students read than his wealthy school district colleague one county over. This works as a limiting factor because the playing field is uneven between the two professionals, but yet they are judged on the same criteria. This study also looked at the cultural and professional differences of principals in the five county Philadelphia areas. The locations of the schools that were picked are of prime consideration, as geographical access is needed in order to conduct the study. This determination ruled out several other school districts such as Lancaster, Berks and Lehigh counties, which have been areas of explosive growth over the past decade and have the same NCLB related issues with their student populations.

Because of the nature of the interview questions and the topic of principal stress related to the NCLB statute, there was a possibility that my interviewees could be biased in the answers that they provide the interviewer. There is significant literature that suggests that when leaders (or non-leaders) are interviewed, they sometimes can view themselves as doing more or perceiving their actions to be bigger than they actually are. This phenomenon is known as “heroic leadership” and is sometimes done intentionally and unintentionally, depending on the person being interviewed. There was only one opportunity to interview these principals, and consequently there was not a lot of time to build up the trust needed to do such a personal interview. This was a possible limitation to my study. Still, their answers stand for themselves as what they said on that particular day and that particular time, which is the essence of qualitative research.

Yet another limitation to the study is that it had very narrow parameters for participation. Schools needed to have achieved AYP and also have a subgroup that passed because of a confidence interval. Schools that met AYP without using a

confidence interval were not included in this study, nor were schools that made AYP through the use of “Safe Harbor” or the Pennsylvania Percentage Index (PPI). It could be theorized that these schools have principals that are feeling the same stress as schools that made AYP because of a confidence interval. The number of schools that met the criteria for this study was high (77), so I did not encounter any issues with a low sample count. Finally, schools that are on AYP warning or corrective action are not eligible to participate in the study, which took a large base of schools out of the research pool.

Another limitation of the study was its inability to extrapolate data findings to other parts of the country, (as opposed to a quantitative study) as it is only focusing on Southeastern Pennsylvania as the research area. The reality is that I needed a logistically manageable sample that would allow me to follow through with his interview subjects in a reasonably short period of time. With that being stated, the interview sample should be ample enough to answer the research questions. Ten principals were interviewed, all from different school demographics; five were male and five were female. These study qualities were enough to get rich data sets, especially for a topic that has significant relevance for all stakeholders, including principals, teachers, parents and students. At the very least, this study added more information to the existing pool of research on principal stress in the era of NCLB accountability, and will help researchers and practitioners understand it’s impact on schools in the Philadelphia area.

There is another limiting factor to this study that has not been mentioned previously. This study focuses on a very narrow context of stress through the lens of NCLB. Even more specific, schools were only included if they made AYP by a confidence interval, and the main thread was how that impacted principal stress.

However, it would not be accurate to think that AYP could be the only reason why principals worry about their jobs. Other professional responsibilities (developing pertinent professional development activities, evaluating effective teaching in the classroom, etc) and personal (caring for families, sickness, stress over the economy, worries about loved ones in harm's way, etc) have a major impact on a principal's overall stress level and need to be considered along with the NCLB factor that was examined in this study.

Significance of the Study

There is no question that educational leaders in the K-12 domain now live in precarious times. Never in the history of American education has there been more emphasis on accountability through the use of quantifiable variables. The major reason I attempted this study is because, as a career educator, I am highly concerned with the professional and personal impact the NCLB mandate has had on educational leaders in this country. Prior anecdotal data that I had collected came mostly from principals who spoke on the condition of anonymity, as if admitting to feeling pressure to make AYP was a sign of weakness. All of the educational leaders interviewed for this study had good things to say about the broad ideas that underpin the actual law, but had grave misgivings about the actual realities of the mandate (Carlin, 2010).

These misgivings usually included the change from creative, teacher controlled classrooms to rote curriculum and constant standardized assessments. Ferrandino (2001) discovered that 32% of school administrators who had left or were leaving their positions identified stress as their primary reason for leaving. Stein (2001) found that the average tenure for superintendents was only six years. As the past five years have progressed

under NCLB, the main focus of principals that I have spoken with have focused on making sure their sub-groups maintained annual yearly progress (AYP). This specific area of the law has caused deep concern among my colleagues, and with it, the implicit stress that comes with knowing that at any point, your school could be put on a corrective action list for any number of sub-group failures.

Bly (2002) posited that educational reform and student accountability have become primary principal stressors with many current studies focusing on the perceived stress levels of school administrators. Consequently, newly implemented reform was reported as a major cause of increased stress in school with principals, producing the same physical and psychological effects as did chronic stress within the general population (Kelley,1998). The stressors are often cumulative in nature. Chandler (2003) found that middle school principals in Florida experienced varying degrees with reported stress when comparing general principal duties; however, they reported the cumulative impact of continuous stress resulted in higher reported events as compared to singular or acute events. NCLB can now be described as a continuous, on -going event in the life of a school administrator. One colleague was so exasperated by his English Language Learners sub-group inability to make AYP (the group included 23 students who were only in the country 15 months), he seriously considered leaving the profession entirely when his school was placed on the warning list for Montgomery County School Districts. His extreme reaction, coupled with the knowledge that his school had scored an 87 % overall proficiency on the reading portion of the PSSA, gave me considerable pause. It also caused me to start taking a serious look at my own school's shortcomings in the subgroup area. From that point, it became obvious that our subgroups were starting to

“level off”, and were in danger of not making AYP. Over the past two years, even with several intensive interventions in place to help our neediest students, we still barely made AYP, and that was only because of the presence of a confidence interval.

With this case study, I wanted to illuminate the perceived stress levels of educational leaders when coping with NCLB, and find out what kind of strategies they are using in order to be successful in these turbulent educational times. I wanted to look at principal stress and growing job dissatisfaction to be a burgeoning problem in the field of education, and affects all schools, K through 12 in this country. Even more specifically, I was interested in exposing the perceived stress at schools that made AYP but only because of a statistical variance (Confidence Interval), as I hypothesize that the stress of administrators was actually higher at those schools. At the same time, I wanted to provide insight into how I think most principals have developed positive coping strategies in order to deal with the growing stressors of the job. This study is highly relevant because of the information that was collected can be used to help other educational leaders successfully address the issues of pressure and stress at their individual schools; it also offers a unique and refreshing glimpse at principal resilience during this tumultuous period.

Since this proposal was created, new AYP data for the 2008-2009 PSSA were released by the Pennsylvania Department of Education, showing tremendous growth by schools across the Commonwealth. Indeed, 2,291 schools achieved AYP this year, up from 2,138 in 2008. 259 schools were on the AYP warning list, down by more than 200 schools in 2008 (PDE Newsroom, 2009). Still, the middle schools in the five county area that had high levels of AYP success were aided by statistical treatments. Of the 29 middle

schools in Montgomery County, 23 were aided by confidence intervals, growth model or safe harbor provisions. Only 6 achieved AYP overall and for all of their tested subgroups. In Bucks County, 22 middle schools needed statistical treatments to make AYP, while five (four in Central Bucks School District) stood on their own, achieving annual yearly progress in all subgroups (Pennsylvania Adequate Yearly Progress Website, 2009). The District of Philadelphia fared better in 2009, with five middle schools meeting AYP this year, a two school increase from 2008. Still, 13 other middle schools did not make AYP, with six of them on Corrective Action II, seventh year. In Delaware and Chester Counties, with a combined 32 middle schools, two (2) middle schools achieved AYP without the help of statistical treatments: Charles Patton Middle School in the Unionville-Chaddsford School District, and Radnor Middle School in the Radnor School District. Overall, a total of 28 middle schools did, however make AYP with the statistical treatments. 77 middle schools all together relied on a treatment to get them into AYP compliant status. This improvement by many schools across the state does not take away the fact that principals are under enormous stress and that stress will only get worse as we move toward 2014 and 100% proficiency for all. Sub-group expectations are expected to rise as much as the regular education population, thereby making the statistical treatments that are effective now obsolete; the pressure to get these students to proficient and advanced levels will continue to increase for the principal and his/her teaching staff.

Theoretical Base

As stated earlier, educational leaders have always felt pressure and stress in their chosen occupation. Major changes over the past century have caused major upheaval in our schools and in the principal's office, and NCLB was not the first movement to

emphasize strict adherence to academic standards and standardized tests. In the 1930's a movement known as "Essentialism" became popular with some educational academics who believed American education had become too "soft". Just as NCLB demands harsh penalties for those who did not "make the cut" so did Essentialist theory. Essentialism has as its roots the scientific management theories, which demanded a top-down hierarchy, assembly –line style view of educational practices. (Gross, 2010). The essentialists have maintained a place at the American education policy table through the 1930's up until today. In the past 60 years alone, there have been three large philosophical shifts in the way Americans look at our educational system, and at their core is the same essentialist philosophy- rigorous standards, high stakes testing and tough accountability for those who do not measure up. The first occurred when Sputnik was launched in 1959. With the realization that the Soviet Union had beaten us to space, not long afterward came the first government backed curriculum change, with the focus being on science and math (McNeil, 2000). Schools all over the country were now teaching science and math concepts to children as young as kindergarten age. It could be argued that this change in the American educational landscape was driven by fear and self-preservation. Either way, our country during that time experienced a cultural and educational turbulence that it had not encountered before. Over the decades, educational policies emerged; some were popular and became the norm; others fell by the wayside. Standardized testing became the norm in 1965 when Congress passed the first federal laws requiring their use in all public schools that received Title I funding. Around this time, The Coleman Report was released, which said that home life was the most important factor increasing child achievement. This report was used by standardized test

supporters to say that the reason diverse populations do poorly on tests is not because of test biases, but the home life of the students (Jalt, 2010). In the late 1970's and early 1980's, a movement known as "Back to Basics" emerged, with an emphasis on reading, writing and arithmetic, along with basic morality and patriotism. This movement is commonly associated as the antithesis of the personal freedom ethos espoused by the counter-culture revolution in the 1960's (Ryan & Cooper, 2006). The thought process of the Back to Basics movement said that American schools should be producing students who listened to directions and followed through on their tasks to completion, with no questions asked. The Back to Basics Movement is almost an exact replica of the essentialist philosophy espoused in 1938. Any negative attitude about the merits of standardized testing was silenced in 1983 with the release of "A Nation at Risk" report. "Nation" could be described as the 2nd seismic shift in American educational history. It was a scathing critique of the American educational system and was primarily funded by business interests, who were worried that the schools were not producing the kinds of employees they needed to be successful. The " Nation at Risk" report gave an impetus to the growing movement of standards based education, and also had a significant impact on the premise of standardized testing of all students in order to measure adequate progress. This 2nd shift resulted in some major educational initiatives, including GHW Bush's America 2000, which for the first time attempted to the creation of school delivery or opportunity to learn standards, and also proposed a private school option for students who were in failing schools and wanted a fresh opportunity. This bill was debated through 1992 and died in the House because of partisan pressure in the Senate. Still, when Bill Clinton took office, he made education reform a top priority, as did Congress. In 1995

Clinton required states to align their program assessments with clear, subject matter standards. Clinton also enacted the Improving America's Schools Act, or IASA, which required that non-title one schools and title one schools have the same standards of performance. This forced States to take a long hard look at their standards, because if the Title one students did not show the same progress as their non-title one peers, federal education dollars would have been jeopardized. (NYSED, 2010). Although many political interests tried to “kill” Goals 2000, it survived because many business leaders and Governors believed in the standards-based movement, and kept it in the forefront on American political circles. These forays by Bush I and Clinton set the stage for the third seismic shift in American education, the passage of the NCLB mandates in 2002. 1,100 pages long, no congressional bill in the history of the United States has caused more turbulence and chaos in the educational field than NCLB and its AYP requirements and sanctions (DeBray, 2007).

These three broad movements from a theoretical viewpoint can be connected to a decision-making theory called Punctuated Equilibrium. The Punctuated Equilibrium theory of Niles Eldridge and Steven J. Gould was proposed as a criticism of the traditional Darwinian theory of evolution (Ikpa, 2008). Gould postulated that history operates on a series of “fits and starts”, sometimes moving very fast and sometimes very slowly or not at all. Darwin did not believe in any jumps at all. From Gould's perspective, political conflict is always at the heart of Punctuated Equilibrium: ideas move in and out of a policy agenda over time; rapid change and then a sense of stability mark the political time frame (Ipka, 2008). The science and math curriculum explosion after Sputnik could certainly be posited as a political maneuver generated by self –

preservation. The educational years before Sputnik were somewhat docile in nature; after, a seismic movement was felt. “A Nation at Risk” focused on the overall preparation of the American student; it ushered in the standards movement and cemented standardized assessment as a way of life in American schools. Finally, NCLB’s passage in 2002 was a gigantic “fit and start” in that school districts would finally be held accountable for their students’ success. Never before had the American education system been so openly challenged; never before had a law been passed with so much teeth to “bite” the system if it did not produce. The deviation of NCLB in relation to Punctuated Equilibrium is the fact that there has been no slow down or “sense of stability” since this “fit” was brought about seven years ago. Principals today are caught up in this movement and have to be incredibly resilient and resourceful in order to survive and flourish in it. But what can principals do to keep their staffs motivated and the students producing in this high stakes environment?

More specifically, what is going to happen as NCLB continues toward the path of “proficiency for all” by 2014? The law has been predictable if one looks at the AYP expectations put forth in 2002. They are still the same. What is completely unpredictable is the fact that this initiative has not come and gone like it’s predecessors before it. In fact, it has gained momentum over the past seven years. This unpredictability might be the underlying pressure that principals may be feeling, consciously or unconsciously. For the first time in American educational history, principals and teachers are personally impacted by their students’ performance on standardized tests. This accountability “fit” has not ended, and my prediction is that NCLB will continue to have a direct impact on principal stress for many years to come.

There are a number of theories about why stress occurs in educational settings that could be directly connected to the NCLB statute. The demand-control-social-support theory of stress postulated by Rodriguez, Bravo and Peiro (2001) suggests that negative stress occurs when an individual is in a job characterized by high demand, low control, and low support. As demands increase, stress increases. When principals do not feel in control of variables associated with a specific problem, their stress level will invariably increase. There is no argument that the NCLB mandate is a high demand proposition with little or no built in flexibility for children who learn differently. Special education students with significant learning disabilities take the PSSA with zero specific accommodations, as specified by federal law. I posit that this rigid accountability system gives no control to the principal or teaching staff, and low or non-existent support from the government makes this stress model highly relevant to the topic of principal stress.

Another stress theory focuses on the outside forces that press upon an individual and therefore overtax their physical and emotional systems. Carl Rogers' theory of stress (1977) suggested that negative stress results when job expectations (those held by the individual in the job and those held by outsiders) clash. This role conflict/role ambiguity usually occurs when a principal who values spending time with his family is expected by his/her superintendent to stay late at night in his building deciphering the latest PSSA data. Role ambiguity occurs when a principal must exert rigid control over a teaching staff in order to meet AYP goals, but is also expected to score high in teacher evaluations about his/her effectiveness and likeability in the building. This is a very difficult and stressful task because most principals today are required under NCLB to use very prescriptive curricula with intensive/remedial programs that are created specifically for

the non-proficient students. These mandates come from central office, and there is little collaboration/communication with teachers, making for a very dysfunctional social environment (Howley, 2001). Rogers' counseling style is based on a person-centered approach, which focuses on that client being responsible for his or her behavior, which can be seen a metaphor for the NCLB focus on educational accountability from a principal's point of view. The self-concept of a school leader is tremendously important and requires that the principal be confident about his/her abilities. The role confusion /role ambiguity could theoretically lead to self-doubt and burn out by the school leader (Tomic & Tomic, 2008). Stein and Pierce (2002) completed research that said almost unequivocally that principals and superintendents became administrators because they wanted to make a difference in the lives of their students, but couldn't because of their jobs often requires them to do everything but provide the educational leadership their staff and students critically need. It is these different concepts of stress that have a similarity woven in between them, and that is the idea of NCLB accountability- a lack of control exerted by outside forces (federal government mandates, social groups), a perception of loss of control by inside forces (your school staff), which leads theoretically to principal burnout.

In summary, this study attempted to find out how NCLB regulations affect educational leaders at the middle school level. This topic is close to my heart, as I am one of the administrative leaders at a school who made AYP only because of a confidence interval within sub-groups. My goals were to find out how other leaders dealt/coped with stress (if they felt any at all) and see what strategies they used in order to comply with the law. I identified limiting and delimiting factors in the study and understood that because

of the qualitative nature of the study, it would not be generalizable to other populations. Through the creation of overarching research questions and protocols, I was able to identify 10 principals who wanted to participate in my study, and interviewed them. The rich data provided by these interviews is presented in chapters four and five. The theoretical constructs of Punctuated Equilibrium and Stress Theory were used to support my study and try to provide a “picture” for why this phenomenon may be occurring.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The review of literature is divided into three main sections. The first will address the dimensions of stress from a physiological and occupational level. The second section will review the history of No Child Left Behind legislation as related to its effect of Annual Yearly Progress on American schools. The third section will review how principals are handling job- related stressors related to the No Child Left Behind law.

Dimensions of Stress

Stress at all levels of our lives can have significant negative effects on our overall well-being. “ Fight or Flight” hormones within the body are changed over time by chronic levels of stress, causing undue pressure on the heart and damaging short term memory cells (Goode, 2002). The technical description of stress can be identified by a person’s psychological anticipation of harm. Biological defense mechanisms are then activated to react to the perceived threat. There is at least partial consensus that stress is seen as a process or interaction between the demands and the individual’s ability to deal with them (Sulsky & Smith, 2005). Work related stress has been identified as having serious implications for the health and emotional well-being of employees, but managing it in an effective way is far from straightforward- many documented stress management techniques have been ineffective in helping workers cope with their issues (Beehr & O’Driscoll, 2005). Quick and Quick (1984) determined that perceived stress is a naturally occurring experience with the consequences of it being good or bad assigned by the individuals experiencing the stress.

Early Research of Stress

In the 1950's Selye did considerable research that was focused on specific symptoms and self-observable signs that were common to stress. He emphasized these signs (inflammatory reactions such as arthritis and inflammation of the skin and eyes) as a warning that a person may be getting to a point where stress is affecting their day-to-day activities. Selye also was the first researcher to divide stress up into three categories: (A) distress, or negative stress, (B) stress or neutral stress and (C) eustress or positive stress, with an understanding that stress can be harmful or motivating depending on how the person perceives the intensity or duration of a stressful event (McGowan & Fletcher, 2009). Newman and Beehr (1979) define job stress as "a situation wherein job related factors to change (i.e., disrupt or enhance) his or her physiological condition such that the person (i.e. mind-body) is forced to deviate from the normal functioning" Chan and Gmelch (1994) found that while psychological response to stress is different in principals, the physiological responses were the same, with all principals reporting increased heart rate, rapid breathing and increase in blood pressure. In today's world of educational accountability, the stress levels of principals has reached new heights and will require further study to understand this phenomena and what it's future effects may be.

Stress and Sickness

It has become common knowledge in the medical community that there is a direct relationship between illness and stress. Thirty years ago Matteson & Ivanievich (1979) completed a study that conclusively showed the negative health consequences of American workers because of the large amount of time that they spent on the job or in

work related activities. There has been conclusive evidence to suggest that stress has become a reason for the ailments ranging from fatigue and menopausal symptoms to hypertension and coronary disease (Aaronson & Pallikkathayil, 2003).

In another study (Clark, 2003), interviewees tended to believe that their stress – filled lives contributed to their sickness, and that “stress was unmanageable and there was little that could be done to stop it”. In the same study, subjects who had recently experienced a heart attack revealed that work stress played a far more influential role than other factors such as smoking, poor diet and lack of exercise.

Ellis (2001) found that high stress levels generated by excessive job demands can result in decreased performance quality, physical “overuse” injuries and stress related illness. Maslach (2000) found that employees, especially teachers and educators, were at high risk for stress-related burnout. Burnout is characterized by a lack of a sense of achievement and by feeling drained at work. It also includes feelings of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization, which are precursors to depression. Cartwright and Cooper (2000) pointed out that in the short term stress can lead to emotional distress, stomach disorders, headaches, sleeplessness, and loss of energy, and in the long term, it can contribute to serious illness and even premature death. Sauter (1999) went a step further, stating that work stress is endemic to the modern workplace and that occupational stress costs American businesses \$ 150 million dollars per year because of absences, lost productivity and health costs.

Occupational Stress

Whether a person chooses to become a businessman, lawyer or teacher, the chance that their job will have high levels of stress is almost a foregone conclusion

considering the way our perception of work has changed over the decades. The number of employees experiencing psychological problems related to occupational stress has increased rapidly in Western countries and mental illness is now cited as the one of the top three causes for missing work. Dovey & Wilday (2009) found that workers who are depressed or have anxiety about their jobs were twice as likely to call out sick. In recent years a high rate of work/change responsibilities has become the norm in many workplaces, driven by technological developments and an increasingly competitive global marketplace (McDonald, 2003). The percentage of people who work a “standard day” has decreased over the last decade, with more people working full time and longer hours in general (US Department of Labor, 2005). Not surprisingly, job demands are among the most frequently cited occupational stressors for full time employees, many of whom are experiencing increased levels of work-related fatigue and stress (Charyszyn & Tucker, 2001).

Current research (McCormick, 2001) suggests that people are more likely to attribute the stress and strain that they experience to the work environment than other life domains. Wainright and Calnan (2002) postulated that employees were likely to draw on a number of sources when forming their opinions about work stress, including organizational policies and practices, whether they belong to a union, and the media.

Most companies that offer stress counseling have the philosophy that the problem is an individual one and must be dealt with by the individual and not the organization (Wainright & Calnan, 2002). Conversely Hepburn and Brown (2001) have found that unions believe that the stress its members feel is structural in nature and is not due to personal attributes. This concept is especially relevant in light of the fact that most school

districts in America have some type of union or union like representation for their teachers. In an ironic twist, Harkness (2005) found that most employees who participated in stress management training at their workplace felt that they risked being labeled “weak” and unable to cope with the demands of the job. They also reported that by disclosing the fact that they were stressed at work that they would be perceived by management as vulnerable, weak, or incompetent. As administrators and principals struggle to motivate their staff in order to meet NCLB requirements, it is in the principal’s best interest to present a face of confidence as opposed to one of stress or weakness.

Greenberg and Valletti (1986) stated that occupations which provide human services, such as attorneys, physicians, teachers, nurses, social workers, police officers, clergymen and counselors are particularly vulnerable to the negative effects of stress in their work environments. These two researchers developed a list of characteristics of human services workers that put them at high risk of developing stress conditions. These characteristics include:

1. Becoming deeply involved in the lives and well-being of others.
2. Wield some degree of control in directing the activity of others.
3. Are regularly exposed to human grief, deprivation, struggle, and failure, as well as the inability of others to cope adequately with their daily functions- mental, physical or emotional.
4. Spend, long, irregular hours accomplishing specific job tasks,

5. Are expected to or expect to perform a variety of activities, many of which may not be directly related to his or her specific function.
6. Are expected to be familiar with and able to make referrals to a variety of resource agencies.

Stress at Work- No Control?

One of the most important elements in the occupational stress process is the perception of control. Control can be over any aspect of work, including location, scheduling, and how the tasks are completed. Jobs can differ in many ways in the amount and type of control they allow employees. Some jobs are very specific and require employees to do the job right there on the spot, under direct supervision of the boss. Other jobs are at the other end of the employment scale, those jobs that are done by high level management that are given assignments that can be done any place, at any time and any manner that they see fit (Spector, 2002). The former is called a Control Stress Model, the latter is called a Control Demand model.

The Control Stress Model follows the progression below:

Perceived Control

Work Environment-----Perceived Stressor-----Negative Emotion-----Strain

Moving left to right, throughout the day employees' experience and perceive events. Most are dull, and they pay no attention to them. However, certain events are perceived as threatening to their physical or psychological well-being- those are the job stressors. That result in negative emotions, most commonly anger or anxiety. These emotions then lead to strains, both behaviors and physical conditions associated with stress (Spector, 2002). When an employee perceives that he is not in control, there is usually a variety of

strains that are associated with his stress: anxiety, frustration, physical symptoms for 30 days or more (e.g., headache and stomach upset) and doctor visits for the prior three months (Spector, Dwyer & Jex, 1988). However, when employees feel that have some control over their stress, they tend to feel better about themselves and their jobs.

Ganster, Fox and Dwyer (2001) studied a sample of nurses over five years. They found that high control at the beginning of the study predicted lower use of medical services (assessed from health insurance records) at the end. Most nurses who felt that they had subjective control over their stress had better mental health as measured by the researcher. This model could be used in every public school in America, with NCLB being the perceived stressor in all cases.

The Control- Demand Model (Karesek, 1979) suggests that there are two important elements involved in the job stress process: control and demands (job stressors related to work tasks, such as workload and uncertainty about what should be done). In this model, only the employees who have low perceived control struggle with the demands that the job puts on them. Conversely, the employees who have high control see such problems as challenges to overcome rather than threats. This model has shown results in studies that vary widely, and there is some evidence that there suggests that hard data has been difficult to find in order to support this theory of perceived stress (Terry & Jimmieson, 1999).

Stress is not just common to the individual employee; there are organizational stressors that affect every part of an enterprise. This phenomena is not specific to school systems; research seems to suggest that if you work with other people in an enclosed area and have common goals, there is a very good possibility that there is going to stress.

Moving into the 21st century, the nature of work has completely changed from 50 years ago. Rapid advances in technology have changed the face of corporations; fewer employees are needed to complete tasks; computers have taken their jobs. The technological explosion, (combined with the world economy's downturn), has resulted in downsizing, the complete elimination of some occupations, and insecure employment contracts (Greenberg, Baron, Sales & Owen, 2005). Hanton & Christopher (2006) studied Olympic athletes that trained together on a regular basis; all were given questionnaires asking about their feelings re: their sports organization over a six week period. Their responses ranged from negative (anger, anxiety, even violence) to positive (happiness, hope). Organizational structures (coaches, managers) were overwhelmingly appraised at being harmful or negative, even by these world-class athletes who have been in the Olympic training system for a number of years.

Organizational Stress

Nissly, Barand & Levin (2005) researched the organizational structures that surround social workers in an urban environment. They examined the relationship between stress, social support and the intention to leave the profession at some point. Half of 418 social workers surveyed thought that they were being supported by their employer/organization, and those with lower levels of stress also felt that strong social support to lean on in times of job crisis. The social support did not however, solve the effects of overall organizational stress, which was reported as extremely high by all social workers surveyed. Police Departments are highly skilled and highly stressed organizations. Scott (2004) conducted a study that focused on stress among rural and small town patrol officers in Pennsylvania. One of the main findings of the study showed

how disruptive administrative changes were to the rank- and file police officers- all said that the changes increased the stress in an already stress filled job. Officers also reported that organizational maltreatment and the dangers of the job made for a highly stressful occupation. There was also a correlation between the organization size and the amount of stress; the smaller the station, the more stressful the job.

Firefighting is another occupation that has a built-in stress component that is standard for all who take on the job. Baker and Williams (2002) studied firefighters and found that the daily work stressors (i.e., being on call, irregular hours) and general organizational pressures in a fire house were actually more stressful than the actual fires themselves. The study also found that within the differing levels of the fire organization there was a differing amount of interpreted stress. Watch officers and lead firemen reported high levels of organizational stress while senior officers reported the lowest.

The medical field is a very stressful work environment in which to work. Akroyd and Caison (2002) researched radiation therapists and their susceptibility to burn-out at three levels- emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and organizational stress. It was discovered that radiation therapists have high levels of the first two stages of burn-out: emotional exhaustion and depersonalization. It was known through prior research that organizational effectiveness (patient care) suffers when these two stages of burnout are present in hospital employees. Efforts to alleviate these stressors within the organization were predicted to have a positive effect, with improved quality of work life and higher levels of job satisfaction being outcomes. Nurses are also in a high stress area of the medical field and are under high organizational stress (Storduer, 2001). The nurses surveyed in this study said stress was at high levels for the physical and social

environment of the hospital itself. The study also looked at how transformational and contingent reward leadership (also large implications for principals- see Brower & Balch, 2005) among nurse managers influenced levels of stress; the results did not influence the nurses stress levels or their emotional exhaustion.

Baaker (2001) stated that while helping people experiencing major health problems can be personally rewarding, it can also be experienced as highly stressful when the patient is not cognizant of the efforts made by the nurse to help them. Jannsen (1999) said high organizational stress in hospitals has gotten larger, mostly because of the increase in job demands due to the technologies that nurses must master, and the overall nursing shortage, which continues to this very day.

Harassment by organizations or by their managers has been shown to have serious negative stress consequences for employees (Estrada, Schiender, & Hitlan 2002), with physical health ailments reported such as headaches, decrease in appetite, weight loss, insomnia and exhaustion. Other research has implied that being a bystander of harassment (indirect harassment) has similar negative consequences. (Walsh, 2006) When harassment occurs on a consistent basis throughout an organization, there is a distinct decrease in organizational commitment by worker and increased levels of work withdrawal by employees in general (Schneider, 1998).

Past Models of Work Stress

Because the positive and negative dynamics of work stress are clear, over the last three decades it has become important for researchers to develop a model which matches up people with their optimum work environment. French (1974) developed a theory in which two factors were measured between the person and their environment: the first fit

was the extent to which an individual's skills and abilities matched the demands and requirements of the job. The other fit was the extent that to which the job environment provides to meet the needs of the individual. Either form of "misfit" will cause occupational stress which may cause job dissatisfaction, depression, physiological strains, and poor mental health.

Cooper and Marshall (1974) developed a model of five categories of environmental stress. These include stresses that are intrinsic to the job, such as poor physical working conditions, work overload, time pressures and physical danger. The second source of stress is the individual's role in the organization, such as role conflict, ambiguity, and the overall responsibility for other's job performance. The third environmental stressor is career development, and this takes on the form of under-promotion, fear of being demoted, and not meeting your professional aspirations. The fourth environmental stressor is about the relations that we have at work with other people. It stands to reason that if a person does not get along with their boss or has trouble delegating authority to other subordinates, a stressful work situation will emerge. The final potential stressor is organizational structure and climate. Stress is created when an employee has no say in decision making and has very little consultation time with colleagues. Several studies have shown that an employee's psychological well being may be greatly influenced by the amount and quality of participation in environmental decisions (French & Kaplan, 1973).

Stress is a recognized issue in all occupations and education is no exception. Twenty five years ago Smith and Milstein (1984) postulated that, "stress is one of the hottest topics being debated among educators today..... However, stress is far from a

new phenomenon. It has vexed educators for at least much of the present century and be probably continue to be one of our major concerns for the foreseeable future” (ibid, p. 47).

Mearns and Cain (2002) focused their research on teacher stress related to personality factors and found that each participant reacted differently to the stress that was going on in at their particular schools. The teachers that believed that they were in control of their negative moods tended to have more positive adaptable outcomes than those who believed that they lacked control over their moods. Particularly vulnerable are newer teachers who may choose to leave the field due burnout. One estimate states that as many as 20% of all new teachers will leave the teaching profession after only two years in the field. However there is also research that suggests that high levels of job stress do not always lead to teacher burnout (Pithers, 1995). This is an important concept as school districts grapple with holding on to its best and brightest teachers by supporting them in the early stages of their career.

Cedoline (1986) combined the components of job burnout in business and industry and found that several factors were also common to educators, including lack of control over one’s destiny; lack of occupational feedback and communication; work overload or under load; role conflict/ambiguity; individual factors and training deficiencies. Educational leaders are not impervious to the rigors of occupational stress and there is a lot of research that confirms sources of stress affect all levels of educators all the way up to college level administrators.

Turch (1989) did a survey that showed results that said teaching is the third most stressful occupation on earth, following air traffic controllers and surgeons. Other surveys

conducted regarding educator burnout (Wilson 1979) have shown that 90 percent of the responding teachers felt some stress and 95 % indicated the need for stress management courses. Piatt (1981) stated that school administrators are now what is called a high-risk stress category. Research on sources of stress for administrators reflected the complexity and demands of the position of the school administrator. Cedoline (1982) states the problems and demands of being an administrator have increased, while the satisfaction has diminished. As an example, the average school administrator is requested to make approximately 400 decisions a day, is responsible for the supervision of forty to fifty individuals and spends over 80 percent of his or her time in contact with people.

Cedoline (1982) stated that “ there are many occupational stressors in education and principals face such distress due to an under appreciative boss, too much paperwork, lack of clear cut goals or duties, unrealistic expectations, competition with colleagues and little opportunity for input”. One of the biggest changes reported by principals is the perception that they are constantly being pulled in several different directions by the many new reform initiatives that they are responsible for. These decisions are expected to be site-based, which adds to their stress level and feelings of autonomy (Whitaker, 1998). Business mangers and sales professionals are not the only occupations that suffer from role based conflict and ambiguity of job description. These symptoms of job stress were evident in the research cited by Kaplan and Jones (1975). Role conflict, role ambiguity, responsibility for people, and intense occupational differences are directly related to job dissatisfaction, job tension, low self-esteem and the development of interpersonal traits which can be destructive to the individual were all mentioned in this study. Role based stressors refer to the difference between what an individual perceives his or her role to be

in the organization and what it is in reality. (Lam, 1988). When task based stressors are combined with principals feelings of powerlessness over their surroundings, the less they are able to deal with the accompanying stress (Milstein & Farkas, 1988).

There are generally four sources of stress for school administrators: task based stress, role based stress, boundary spanning stress and conflict mediating stress. Within those dimensions stressors are identified by subpopulations of school administrators including superintendents and building level principals (Welmers, 2005). Task based stressors are those that result from the normal duties of an individuals job completed while doing their everyday routines. Role-based stress pertains to those tasks individuals must perform within their role as a school leader including evaluation, student discipline and developing budgets. Boundary spanning stress results from interactions outside of the primary work areas such as dealing with parent-teacher organizations or creating community relationships. Conflict mediating stress refers to the manner in which principals resolve conflicts, where they are created by their own actions or by mediating between or among groups involved with the school (Welmers, 2005).

It was commonly thought in the 1950's 60's and 70's that women would not make good administrators because of what was thought of "poor coping skills"

(Welmers 2005).

Gmelch and Swent (1977), using their Administrative Stress Survey (1977), dispelled that myth by surveying all Oregon State school administrators. The findings showed that female administrators experienced substantially lower levels of occupational stress on all four dimensions when compared to their male counterparts. On the contrary, subsequent studies found that stress factors among administrators were observed to

increase with age and tenure, and principals and superintendents experienced widely different degrees of stress and many different strategies for coping, including physical activity, mental control and management skill development.

In the 1980's several studies focused on the stress levels of school administrators and their reactions to stressors. Cook (1980) replicated the Oregon study in Wyoming and compiled a list of the ten most stressful individual stressors as ranked by principals were:

1. Complying with state, federal, and organizational rules and polices
2. Feelings that meetings take up too much time
3. Trying to complete reports and other paperwork on time
4. having to make decisions that affect the lives of individual people that I know (Colleagues, staff members, students, etc)
5. Evaluating staff members' performance.
6. Being interrupted frequently by phone calls
7. Trying to resolve parent/school conflicts
8. Imposing excessively high expectations on myself
9. feeling I have to participate in school activities outside of the normal working hours at the expense of my personal time
10. Feeling that the progress of my job is not what it should be.

Administrative constraints, intrapersonal conflict,. Interpersonal relations, role expectations and administrative responsibility were all represented in the general stress categories. Administrative constraints topped the list, being represented 4 times among the top ten stressors (Cook, 1980).

Piatt (1981) pointed out eight common stress elements that appeared to have the most effect on administrators. They were, person/position match, brain processing mismatch, uncertainty, work overload, work underload, interpersonal tension, excess competition, and external pressure. Piatt postulated that many principals are not suited for their positions because their personality makeup is geared to working with children and not adults. Dealing with criticism on a constant basis and handling crisis after crisis is not part of their personality makeup, and the pressure intensifies. Lemley (1987) lists behaviors that occur when educational leaders perceive high degrees of individual stress within an organizational structure. These include:

1. Reducing the amount of time individuals devote to important task within their organization.
2. Redefining responsibility in such a way that the individual is no longer willing to recognize the authority and is unwilling to take ownership of the decisions.
3. Overwhelmed by information, the leader becomes incapable of processing new or different information.
4. Becomes pre-occupied with superficial involvement and is unable to recognize the depth of the problem.
5. Displays a defeatist attitude whereby the leader gives up before being confronted by a stressful situation.
6. Verbally states negative attitudes regarding any new assignment or idea.
7. Displays detachment so that the individual will not recognize a particular situation for what it is.

8. Frequently wastes valuable time.
9. Inappropriate humor is used outside the constraints of the situation.
10. Leaders may begin to hide from responsibility through inappropriate delegation of duties or using others to act as a buffer for their actions.

Whitaker (1992) stated that an educational leader's effectiveness in dealing with teachers' parents and students can be negatively influenced by the reaction a principal has to stressors within the school setting. Shumate (1999) found that "stress and its negative effects represent a significant problem for principals in leadership positions and can seriously influence an individual's emotionality, physical health and professional abilities". These studies have showed a propensity for school administrators to become over-stressed, regardless of the era in which they worked. Whether it was pre-NCLB or post, school principals have faced a myriad of issues as they tried to perform the job responsibilities in an effective manner.

The No Child Left Behind Legislation and Its Effect on American Schools

Before principal stress related to No Child Left Behind can be thoroughly researched, it is necessary to understand the history of the law and where its origins sprung from. Eighteen years prior to the passage of NCLB there was a landmark study released in 1983 by the National Commission on Excellence. The title of the document "A Nation at Risk" underscored the severity of its contents. According to the report, American students were behind other industrial nations in the areas of math and science, and the gap was growing wider each year. One of the warnings of the study heeded that

“the educational foundations of our society are being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our future as a nation and as a people” (From Foy, 2008).

Greater focus started to come to schools as a result of the news media, which realized that there was a genuine interest by the public about how well (or poorly) schools performed. This in turn led to healthy debate as to how America should improve its educational standards and schools. Beginning in the mid-1990’s and continuing to 2000, major concerns were raised about accountability for student achievement (Foy, 2008).

Between 1990 and 1994, there were several proposals to create a voluntary national testing program in order to produce student performance data; this data would then be used to design national educational standards (Carnevale & Kimmel, 1997). Both President Bush and Clinton had backed these endeavors through their “America 2000” and “Goals 2000” initiatives and were instrumental in getting Congress to think seriously about educational reform efforts (Debray 2005). Up until this time, Congress had been content to let each individual State and local district define what they thought was appropriate to teach. The change to government intervention in education was considered by some to be the largest switch in governmental philosophy since the New Deal initiatives instituted by FDR (Lemann, 2000). From some perspectives philosophically, NCLB is considered to fall under the context of neoliberalism, a concept that advocates for “the deregulation of economy, trade liberalization and the predominance over the financial sector over the American way of life” (Hurst, 2007). From this philosophy comes a world view, and, according to Bracey, (2008) NCLB is presented by the government as important tool in making sure America stays competitive in the global market. This was emphasized in a speech by President Bush in October of 2006 when he

stated that “If we fail to give our students the skills necessary to compete in the world of the 21st century, then the jobs will go elsewhere” (Harvard Educational Review, 2006). This law also is reflective of a federalist philosophy, in which the federal government exerts control over entities that are generally considered State priorities. States (such as Connecticut) have declared that NCLB violates the 10th amendment by saying that the federal government has stepped over its bounds in regulating educational policy. As of this date, this issue and many others like it are still under judicial review.

Philosophically driven or not, NCLB was crafted by a coalition of republican and democratic lawmakers in the spring/summer of 2001, and had the full support of President George Bush. On January, 8, 2002 it was adopted by Congress with the stated purpose of “closing the achievement gap” between economically and racially disadvantaged school children (NCLB Statute, 2002). It included accountability measures never seen before in public education, including mandatory testing mandates and severe sanctions for schools who did not meet Annual Yearly Progress (Debray, 2007). The NCLB law also signaled a new, larger role in education for the federal government, which brought its own problems, including how to enforce the new federal policies. Eventually, a federal policy emerged that dictated that each State would set up its own accountability system that would be approved by the Department of Education (NCLB, 2002). The law calls for annual testing of students in grades 3-8 in reading and mathematics (DeBray, 2007). In 2003 an 11th grade test was introduced.

This component of the law and has put significant pressure on schools (principals and teachers) to meet specific numerical goals for all students, culminating in a 100% proficiency level for every student in the United States by 2014 (NCLB, 2002).

Included in the Annual Yearly Progress component are a list of consequences for schools that do not achieve the percentages for a particular school year, which include School Improvement, Corrective Action, and, eventually, removal of the principal and reconstitution of the non-achieving school. The AYP mandate is expected to stretch out over a 6 year period, so schools that are in corrective action will have opportunities to meet the numerical standards with interventions from State and federal agencies (NCLB, 2002).

There is another important factor when considering AYP- the inclusion of all subgroups in the overall reporting of each school. These sub-groups, which include special education, economically disadvantaged, English Language Learners, and under-represented student populations, are an integral part of the Annual Yearly Progress plan and must also meet the proficiency percentage dictated for each school year (NCLB, 2002).

English language learners (ELLs) have shown a significant growth in the United States and have had a considerable impact on our education system. In the US, the number of immigrant children enrolled in pre-k-12 schools rose slightly more than 57% between 1995-1996 and 2005-2006 (Office of English Language Acquisition, Language enhancement, and Academic Achievement for Limited English Proficient Students [OLEA], 2007). The total number of English Language Learners (ELLS) has exceeded 5 million or 10 % of the total school population (OLEA, 2007). Fairbairn and Fox (2009) point out that there is a critical need to address the “linguistic and cultural diversity as part of an ongoing process of test development for this population of students”. Currently there is no provision in the NCLB statutes that takes into account ELL’s linguistic

challenges, requiring all ELL students to take the math portion of the PSSA, while waiting a year before they complete the reading and science portions.

The final major provision of NCLB is in the area of school choice. Parents of students who attend “low performing schools” are given the opportunity to transfer to a higher performing school. The provision is intended that no child is “trapped” in a low performing school (Odland, 2006). In April 2008, Margaret Spellings, Secretary of the Department of Education, made changes to NCLB that were regulatory in nature and done in lieu of the reauthorization process that is now in limbo. These changes included mandates that all States must calculate their graduation rates in a uniform way, a provision that says the percentages of minority graduates will be monitored and sanctions assessed if they do not meet criteria, free tutoring notification provisions for parents, and the mandatory notification of parents that their child can transfer out of low performing schools at least two weeks before school starts (American School Boards Journal, 2008).

High Stakes Testing – A Consequence or a Blessing?

There is a growing debate inside and outside the world of education as to the efficacy of high stakes testing and if it truly is an accurate measurement of student progress. The main thrust of the debate centers on the crucial assumption that requiring mandated assessments will improve classroom instruction and eventually student achievement (Foy 2008). It is a fact of law that every U.S. State has some form of testing program in place and is being auditing on a yearly basis by the U.S. Department of Education (Kim, 2005). Lawmakers who support NCLB firmly believe that instituting a comprehensive testing program would direct teachers to focus their instruction on skill

areas that are specified for the whole classroom, not just one or two select students. The overall effectiveness of the school would then be measured by the outcomes of the test. Olson argued (1999) that because of the differing rigor from state to state when comparing curricular content, it was unfair to use a singular tool to measure the progress of an entire school. Not surprisingly, 39% of teachers who took a survey about NCLB by Reading Today Daily thought that the law needed to change and high stakes testing needed to be wiped out entirely. (Reading Today, 2008) Gross (1998, 2001) found that three important factors had to be interconnected in order for students to be successful- the triangle of curriculum, instruction and assessment. If one is changed or altered, the others must be changed or altered. When looked at through the lens of High stakes testing and NCLB, the triangle is actually reversed, with high stakes testing actually driving the curriculum with a focus on teaching what is going to be on assessments (Foy, 2008).

Proponents for high stakes testing consistently cite the failure of the American educational system, specifically the lack of coherent standards across subject areas. According to an article in USA Today (July 2008), NCLB and the use of high stakes testing is working. A study done by the Center on Education Policy found that reading and math scores were rising as well as minority achievement gaps narrowing. According to the data, elementary school reading and math in 21 of the 27 states made moderate-to-large gains, and 22 out of 22 states showed moderate to large gains for the middle school program. Finally, States that took part in the study showed black/white learning gaps were narrowing from widened scores reported the previous year (USA Today, 2008).

Usually the standards argument is tied into assessing these standards to measure school effectiveness and individual student achievement. Even before NCLB was passed, the media was focused on poor test scores, ineffective (and overpaid) teachers, and a high- school drop out rate that dwarfed other industrialized nations (Foy, 2008) By 1998 States were trying to figure out ways to standardize the assessment practices of their school districts in the name of educational reform (Ginsberg & Berry, From Foy, 2008). From a political standpoint there is much to gain for a budding legislator to embrace educational reform. One of the more famous examples of a candidate gaining political capital is when George W Bush used educational reform as a platform in the Texas Governor's race to upset then- incumbent Anne Richards (Stone, 2007: From the Motion Picture, *W*). Linn (1999) found that attitudes re: accountability testing was positive in the State of Texas because the tests were inexpensive, quick to impose and considered acceptable indicators of student performance. After 10 years of standardized testing, there are still more question marks than answers. In 2006, President Bush declared that NCLB was "99.9 percent pure" and that the only changes that needed to be made were to expand testing to the high school grades.

Under Margaret Spellings, the US Department of Education has embarked on a philosophy of school accountability to the parents and taxpayers, with heavy sanctions against schools and principals who cannot meet the specified criteria (Cech, 2008). One of the beneficiaries of high stakes testing and NCLB has been the expansion of test making companies like ETS. Chittoran and Miles (2001) completed research that concluded that adequate test preparation significantly improves student attitudes toward test taking, hence, actual performance on the high stakes test itself. These and other

studies have helped give test preparation companies the impetus to create tests that will not only “measure” student progress but provide opportunities to make a lucrative profit for themselves and their shareholders.

Springer (2008) completed research on the effect of accountability programs on the distribution of test scores among low performing students. His findings seem to suggest that NCLB’s threats of sanctions are positively correlated with test score gains by below proficient students in failing schools. These gains are not at the expense of the high achieving students in the school, and the thought from Springer was that the threat of sanctions may stimulate a greater productivity within failing schools.

From a local perspective, most city and urban political leaders embrace NCLB and it’s concept of accountability for principals and teachers (Hoff, 2008). Mayors in New York City, Chicago, Atlanta and Washington DC have specified to Congress that one of their ultimate goals were to establish a process to create national academic – content standards and to set up experiments for paying teachers based on the achievement of their students.

The Council for Great City Schools is made up of 60 mayors from across the country representing the need to NCLB and emphasizes the need for change in the educational leadership of schools if AYP is not met. They also feel that national standards and tests would make it easier for educators to know how the achievement of their students compares with performance of the rest of the country (Hoff, 2008).

According to Glenn (2008), “urban leaders are embracing accountability under the NCLB law because it gives them leverage to force changes in schools that otherwise would have been resisted by principals and teachers”. He goes on to state that most of the

accountability and high stakes testing problems have come from superintendents in the suburbs, not the urban districts, because Mayors in urban areas can now use the NCLB as a motivational tool for principals and teachers to keep their jobs.

Other educational researchers believe that the move to high stakes testing has been a disaster for American education. Kohn (2001) argued that high stakes testing denies the reality faced by many students, particularly those in urban districts, unprepared to meet tough new standards. There is also a tendency by school districts to “teach to the test”, no matter what the cost is to the teacher or the student. Stover (2007) stated that Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) should completely change to allow schools to track student progress over time by using growth models. These growth models will allow lower performing schools who make significant gains to receive recognition for their efforts. Most of the focus has been on sub-groups, as schools that do not meet AYP in these areas end up on the sanction list, no matter how well they did from an overall standpoint. This is true even if a single sub-group of 30 students falls short of AYP goals. Some studies have suggested that nearly one in three schools failed to meet AYP goals in 2007, and thousands of schools face sanctions ranging from mandatory school choice to complete restructuring (Stover, 2008). As school districts move toward the “magic” year of 2014, 100 % proficiency will be expected at the federal level in math and reading. There are several researchers that think that although well intentioned, there is no way that school districts will be able to meet that requirement. In a response to high stakes testing and NCLB in general, The National School Boards Association has put its recommendations into legislative form, titled the No Child Left Behind Improvements Act, which was incorporated into a bill (HR 5709) in 2008. Koretz (2008) has postulated

that under NCLB there has been widespread teaching to the test and other dubious strategies that are meant to “game” the system and make the test scores look better than they actually are. Koretz compares the high stakes testing measures that occurred in Kentucky in the early 1990’s to what is happening today, pointing out that although scores went up on the standardized tests, they went down considerably when the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) administered their test.

Sternberg (2008) believes that there are two sets of definitions for academic excellence- one for the actual schools that educate our children and the bureaucratic definitions that are set for in the NCLB mandate. The NCLB mandate is unfair to students according to the researcher because it only focuses on the bottom of the school distribution lists (read: failing schools who do not reach AYP). He also suggests that the law itself is problematic in that it deemphasizes instructional programs that are essential to a truly great education- class like art, music, and physical education get short shrift while reading and math instructional minutes have risen exponentially. He goes on to postulate that rather than focus on the three traditional R’s of education- “reading, ‘riting and ‘rithmetic”- and teach students to use another set of R’s- reasoning, resilience and responsibility (Sternberg, 2006). Rose and Gallup cited that in 2007, 70 % of school districts in the US reported that they had cut instructional minutes in social studies, foreign language and the arts to focus on literacy and math. Those same districts reported a “backlash” from parents who thought their districts were going to far in the direction of “teaching to the test”.

In a recent study completed by the CEP, (2008), researchers estimated that during the 2007-2008 school year, 3,599 schools nationwide were forced to choose one of

several restructuring options to change their management or instructional strategies with the goal of improving student performance in the face of not meeting AYP. This was a 56 % increase from the year before and included the option by States to reconstitute whole schools- many of them urban- if decided that was the remedy needed. In another study (Cardullo, 2008) completed recently in California, researchers found that although there has been recent increases in the overall number of students who are advanced and proficient, the tests tend to obscure the struggles that individual schools have in meeting the goals of AYP. It was found that many sub-groups, especially English language learners and disadvantaged students continued to have difficulty meeting the federal mandate over the next 5 years. (Cardullo, 2008). CEP (2008) found that once schools find themselves going into mandatory restructuring, it's hard for them to get out. In the 2007-2008 school year, only 19% of the restructuring schools met their targeted AYP goals. As stipulated by NCLB, a school must meet AYP for two straight years to get be removed from sanctions. The study's researchers predict that as the nation approaches 2013-2014, it will become next to impossible for schools to meet their proficiency goals by the end of that time period.

Teachers have felt the impact of NCLB in the different ways they present curriculum to their students. In another study by CEP (2007), it was reported that school districts have purposely increased the time spent English and math and have decreased time in all other subjects, including social studies, science, art, physical education, recess and even lunch. This study began shortly after the law was enacted in 2002. The average increase per week for English was 141 minutes, and 8p minutes overall for math. The average drop in science was 74 minutes, but that may change as science will most likely

become an AYP-eligible test in Pennsylvania in the near future. Valli and Buese (2008) completed research that focused on the changing roles and attitudes in teachers since NCLB. Most teachers report that their work lives have become much faster, with little autonomy, and struggle with curriculum pacing/alignment, and data driven tasks that are mandated by building principals.

NCLB - 2008 and Beyond

Presently legislators and other educational leaders are still struggling to reauthorize NCLB, and are dealing with a host of other international and domestic issues that have put education on the backburner for the moment. Beyond the fight to change the parameters of annual yearly progress, other issues in the bill such as supplemental services, highly qualified teachers, school transfers, how to teach special education and English language learners all pose serious issues for the reauthorization (Stover, 2008). Recently, Klein (2009) wrote that the massive spending bill known as the US American Recovery and Reinvestment Act is being explored as a possible way to prevent layoffs and cuts in educational programs across the country. President Barack Obama and Congress recently authorized the \$ 787 billion economic stimulus measure- it includes \$115 billion for education, including a \$ 54 billion State –Fiscal Stabilization Fund aimed primarily at helping states reverse cuts to K-12 schools and colleges. Some lawmakers argue that because of the massive infusion of cash there shouldn't be any more talk that NCLB is an unfunded mandate; educators have a different perspective, arguing that the money is being used to replace funds that were lost in the financial upheaval of the last year, so there really is no net increase. This is not the first time that States have argued over NCLB and whether it is funded properly. In 2005 Connecticut became the 1st state to

file suit against the federal government over NCLB. The state claimed that the federal government in effect was “coercing” the State to comply with the law by threatening to withhold over 435 million dollars in educational aid if they did not adopt NCLB standards.

Even in the face of the latest stimulus package, there has been an attempt to challenge the law as an unfunded mandate in federal court (Walsh, 2009). Michigan, Texas and Vermont banded together and went before the 6th circuit court and argued that there are obligations imposed on them by NCLB, but the money provided is not enough to implement those requirements. The case is still being decided by the full US Court of Appeals with an outcome expected in the summer of 2009.

Internationally, the use of standardized testing to drive instruction has shown a downward trend in recent years. Hargreaves (2008) reported that a study of several developed nations has shown that there is a distinct move away from standardized testing and accountability. Singapore has instituted a mandate that says all teachers must have 10% free time to come up with independent lessons designed to enhance student motivation and creativity. None of the Nordic countries (Norway, Sweden, Finland and Denmark) have accountability programs, but yet are among the highest performers on the Programme of International Student Assessment (PISA). Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have all recently abandoned selective exams of students. In Britain (the most tested in the world), improvements have hit a plateau and gains have been debunked as statistical anomalies (MacBeath, 2007). The majority of English parents are now in disagreement with the non-stop testing practices of young children (Shaw 2004).

Attitudes among teachers and principals with regard to how curriculum should be delivered has become an issue according to a RAND research study completed in 2008. The study states that there is a wide variation among teachers when reporting specific strategies that they were using to meet AYP benchmarks. These strategies reported do not match the specific strategies that are being reported by the principal or central office staff, showing a disconnect between what teachers are actually doing in the classroom. Teachers also felt negatively over the top-down nature of the accountability programs and how they influence personal classroom practices, specifically how administrators are narrowly focused on teaching standards that are narrowly focused on material found to be on the test. The overall effect is a subtle pushback by the teachers by reclaiming control of their rooms through the use of eclectic or innovative techniques not recommended by central office (Hamilton, 2008). Heene and Jang (2008) did a similar study and found relatively small achievement gaps to be associated with teachers who reported that schools prioritized accountability targets. Those who responded said they did not necessarily follow accountability targets but instead used various strategies to instruct and had better overall success with their students' during standardized testing. Fuller (2008) states that when the latter happens, there is a governmental expectation that the principal will then come into the classroom and use the "stick" of NCLB mandates to get the teacher back on focus. These confrontations between principal and teacher are not motivating and, according to the researcher "not a very good or motivating public policy".

The National Association of Secondary School Principals has proposed that the NCLB Act be amended to include national standards for reading and mathematics

education (Manzo, 2008). Their position is that with 50 states and 50 different standards, it's time to have one set of national standards for these subject areas, since schools are subject to sanctions if these subjects don't reach AYP. There is another proposal that suggest that states align their standards with top-performing countries around the world as a means of ensuring that students in the United States can compete with their peers around the globe.

Popham (2009) has stated that there needs to be some basic changes to the definition of Annual Yearly Progress if there is to be a successful reauthorization of NCLB. He recommends changing the descriptive labels – basic, proficient and advanced to below grade level, at grade level, and above grade level. He argues that parents will readily understand these descriptors. He also advocates establishing realistic levels of improvement, the use of tests that measure instructional improvement, and to focus public attention on subgroups.

Juola- Rushton (2008) suggested in a study that recent advances in neuroscience combined with principles gained by constructivism support the importance of developing and implementing a child centered curriculum that emphasizes choice and creativity. The strategies of standards based, lock –step instruction does not jibe with a constructivist philosophy, and according to the researcher, NCLB strategies such as teaching to the test hurts children in the long run. Brain research would seem to suggest that using an open, student driven philosophy toward instruction enhances the neuro-pathways of students (Juola-Rushton, 2008).

There is also a growing movement in educational circles that says communities, not government mandates, can make a meaningful difference in the lives of its children.

Mediratta (2008), in a report issued by the Annenberg Institute for School Reform, the study found that several “bottom-up” initiatives such as parents partnering with schools helped improve standardized test scores by 27% from the previous year. Other examples of “bottom-up” initiatives were faculty engagement and the break-up of large, dysfunctional schools into smaller, manageable pieces. The biggest finding- a school community that is positively oriented toward achieving educational goals, generally has high parent involvement and high teacher parent trust (AISR, 2008). In another study (Sofa, 2008), a superintendent followed a school district’s reform model and found that by using a “bottom-up” approach they affected positive change by developing multi-faceted classroom-level interventions to support struggling students. The superintendent focused on how the initial success at the middle level was then scaled up and down through the other grades. His argument is that if school districts are to succeed, they will need to trust their teachers and principals (Bottom-up) and move away from the top-down accountability model that is prevalent not only in Pennsylvania but across the country.

Principal Stress and its Relation to NCLB

Even before the advent of the NCLB legislation, there have been numerous studies designed to interpret principal stress in schools. Many of the studies (Gmelch & Chan, 1994) since 1980 have focused on causes, responses, and consequences of administrative stress. The principalship could be described as a highly complex and demanding role and that principal effectiveness is crucial to school improvement (Fullen & Hargreaves, 1996). As our society has changed, administrators have been asked to

take on more and more responsibilities, along with the day to day operation of running a school (Whitaker, 1988).

These responsibilities have heightened the stress levels of principals across the country. There has also been a significant change in the social fabric of our country, notably the changing demographics of students and principals find themselves dealing with the problems that come from this shift (Sarros, 1988). Chandler (2001) stated that newly implemented reforms were reported as a major cause of increased stress in school principals producing the same physical and psychological effects as did chronic stress on the general population. One of the major changes in the environment of the American school was the passage of NCLB in 2001. With the passage of the law has come a whole new set of stressors that previously were not considered prior to 2001.

Salazar (2006) found that principals reported high stress levels when trying to implement their specific NCLB initiatives. Sixty percent of principals surveyed also thought that NCLB mandates stifled creativity in schools because of the focus on testing and measurement. Finally, principals responded in overwhelming fashion that the stress of NCLB has dampened their enthusiasm for working in their respective school districts (Salazar 2006). According to Magee (2006), there is a growing belief among principals that schools have become “fear driven” in their delivery of educational services as opposed to being creative partners with the state and federal agencies that are now overseeing them. School leaders whose performance was once evaluated by a variety of factors that reflected how difficult the job really is are now being looked at in a much more narrow light (Nelson & Magee, 2005). Some former educational leaders who left the profession have said that coping with the stress of NCLB had become unbearable for

them and that they were not capable or trained to take on the complexities of the NCLB law (Brown, 2006). Finally, in a study done by Welmers (2005), North Carolina principals report high levels of stress being compared to other schools from an AYP perspective, complying with state, federal and organizational rules, being held responsible for test scores, and feeling that they have failed if the test scores are too low.

The Changing Role of the Principal and its Implications for Stress

Eckman (2006) indicated that the work of the school principal has transformed over the past two decades to include increasingly more stressful, complex demands. In particular, principals are required to:

- Be instructional leaders
- Close the achievement gap,
- Respond to accountability measures (NCLB)
- Meet the needs of students with disabilities
- Report to state and federal agencies
- Provide support to parents in need,
- Respond to increased demands for home-school communication,
- Maintain safe school environments;
- Ensure all students achieve on the standardized tests,
- Act as change agents
- Provide visionary leadership in schools desperately in need of new directions

(Eckman, 2006).

At the front of this massive responsibility is the need to be an instructional leader, who is able to collect and use data from a variety of sources and respond to the new

accountability standards. They must also fully understand the scope and sequence of NCLB and prove that they can meet the expectations of the law (King, 2002). These expectations can be extremely stressful for not only the beginning principal but also the veteran administrator.

Williams and Portin (1999) identified five general categories reflecting a combination of major stressors principals reported while doing their job. These include:

1. Time constraints due to meetings and excessive workloads.
2. Conflict between school and community.
3. Communication from the central office of changing governmental and organizational requirements.
4. Evaluation and negotiations with staff members.
5. Dealing with student behavior and the need for increased student achievement.

Shumate (1999) used these five areas to measure the impact of principal stress in relation to how legislation was changing the educational climate. He generally found that the perceived stress levels were higher as government became more involved in the educational outcomes of schools. In another study done in the same year, researchers found that specific activities throughout the day contributed to perceived stress levels.

These include:

1. Time, a 60 to 80 hour workweek
2. Workload and complexity of the job.
3. Supervision of the evening activities is never ending
4. Minimal pay differential between top teachers and administrators
5. Bombarded with very high expectations of a community and employer

6. The mandated mountains of paperwork
7. The traditional administrator's job is being seen as negative in society
8. Greater difficulty in helping teachers becomes more collaborative.

Dempster, Freakly and Parry (2001) found in their study that principals were mostly frustrated by the lack of time that is given them in order to design solid educational programs to help their students and teachers succeed. Low morale of teachers, policy constraints and perceptions about the failure of public education put principals in a “no-win” situation because they have to cater to everyone's needs, and generally fall short of that giant task. Feelings that have been described by various principals in the study range from disillusionment all the way to outright despair over the current situations in their schools.

Grubb & Flessa (2006) suggested that it is not surprising that given the multiple complexities of the job, time constraints, and the huge work loads of the administrators that there has been a giant turnover in the profession and a shortage of teachers interested in becoming a principal. With all of the duties that accompany running a building, it is very difficult to do the main job of a principal, which is to be an instructional leader. Salary has also been found to be a factor in determining entrance into the field. Archer (2002) found that while overall administrators earned more than their teachers, there was only a 4 % pay differential at the elementary and middle school levels. Couple this with the fact that most instructors only work 10 months a year rather than 12 and that most principals stay far later than their regular hours make the job that much more unappealing (Meyers, 2008).

Gorkin (2004) hypothesized four stages of burnout for educational leaders, specifically principals. He describes burnout as the “gradual process by which a person, in response to prolonged stress and physical, mental and emotional strain, detaches from work and other meaningful relationships. The result is lower productivity, cynicism, and a feeling of being drained, having nothing more to give”. The four stages of principal burnout are:

1. Physical and mental exhaustion.
2. Shame and Doubt
3. Cynicism and Callousness
4. Failure, Helplessness and Crisis

These stages cut across all educational demographics and school environments; step four is seen as a crisis point that when reached usually signals a crossroads of sorts for the principal. Either they will seek support for the stress or they will leave the profession altogether.

Principal stress has changed considerably over the past 20 years. Whereas the principal used to be as a semi-autonomous figure in the past, a post-NCLB principal has to be able to do many different tasks and is generally under a community microscope. Petersen (2002) found that more and more, principals need to establish rapport with people of many different ages, backgrounds and demographics. One minute a teacher might be breaking down PSSA sub-group data, and the next calming down a parent who is screaming that her daughter was denied breakfast because of her ethnic heritage. Juggling these tasks and keeping a broad school constituency happy is a difficult feat for

principals and can often lead to mental fatigue if the leader is not vigilant about recognizing the signs that he or she may be “burning out”.

For new principals, completing simple, everyday acts can be fraught with peril (Gorkin, 2004). In this study, the researcher found that a principal’s day consists of many small tasks that are short in duration and rapid in pacing. Most exchanges last from one to two minutes, so a principal might face fifty to sixty activities in a single hour. These brief encounters force principals to analyze problems and identify solutions quickly. Most new principals, faced with escalating expectations from all stakeholders, find themselves sometimes making important school altering decisions without the required maturity or experience. Principals who stayed in the profession over five years reported that they accepted the fact that they could not complete all of their tasks in one day and that tasks get done in “bits and pieces” throughout the day.

King (2002) indicates that most principals today are no longer the typical building administrator from 20 years ago, managing people and the master schedule with little or no interference from external forces. Building principals are not only expected to be instructional leaders, but also must encourage professional development among their staffs, make educational decisions that are data-driven and have complete accountability to the community at large. Pressure comes from a myriad of competing interests outside the school environment. Jones (2001) stated that at one time or another every societal ill has been blamed on the American educational system. Smith (2001) said that groups now try to exert pressure on schools that were once the domain of the parent, religious groups, law enforcement and social services. Principals have to be seen in the building as a continuous presence and keep their office doors open on a daily basis. Eckman (2006)

suggests that these responsibilities can become overwhelming and contribute to low job satisfaction as well as low average years in which a principal stays at one school.

Another unavoidable stressor in a principal's world is the almost constant threat of litigation. Because of the nature of America's "sue-first" mentality, school districts and principals find themselves under a constant barrage of threats and lawsuits by a myriad of special interest groups and individual parents. (Education Week, 2007) Harris Interactive Market Research (2004) did a survey on litigation in the public schools that included principals and teachers. Of significance were the following findings:

- Most educators practiced a phenomena that could be considered "defensive teaching"
- More than 50 % found they were concerned about the risks of legal challenges.
- Most principals were just as concerned about legal challenges in their schools as they were about being NCLB compliant.
- A majority of educators are somewhat worried that a decision they make will be challenged legally.

The fact that more and more principals and teachers are being personally sued under the Americans with Disabilities Act has fostered a more defensive posture for educators. Operationally, most principals agreed that there is a need for fewer laws but agree that mandates would help improve their quality of education and discipline in their schools (Gould, 2008). First Amendment rights of students have recently been in the headlines (*Weedsport Central High School v. Wisiewski*), and have stretched school district budgets already suffering because of the weak economy. The *Wisiewski* case,

which was a clear cut case of a student issuing a death threat to an administrator through an e-mail, went all the way to the 2nd U.S. Court of Appeals and is currently under appeal (Ardia, 2007). The basis for the appeal was that since the student wrote the threat on an e-mail message to several friends, it was protected speech under the first amendment.

These and other lawsuits filed daily by parents and special interest groups have ramifications for learning because precious time that could be devoted to instructional leadership is being taken up by depositions and court dates.

New Ideas in an Era of Accountability

As stress levels rise for educational leaders, some school districts are trying to combat principal burnout by offering incentives for them to stay in their positions. In Montgomery County Maryland, there has been a large increase in principal salaries that has been instituted over the last two years. On the other side of retaining top talent is the concept of using retirees to lead their schools. The Maryland State legislature has proposed a measure to entice retired principals to return by allowing them to keep their retirement pay on top of their salary, which would equal a 50 % increase in their pay (Bhatti, 2002). Even with the incentives, most principals who have left the profession say they would not come back, primarily for three reasons:

1. An overall feeling of disconnectedness with the district leadership;
2. A pay decrease in which some teachers make more than the principal;
3. The long, before and after school hours that are uncompensated and largely overlooked. (Mizejewski, 2002)

This leaves school districts like Prince Georges County in the unenviable position of having to recruit retired principals to take the place of the ones who have left the profession frustrated by a myriad of reasons. Rutherford (2006) has suggested that with increasing demands, less resources and fewer people willing to take on a the challenges the principal's job entails, that schools should take a look at the concept of co-principals. From the researcher's viewpoint, schools have become to complex for one person to lead, and it is time for new organizational leadership structures to meet these complex demands. Dufour (2002) takes on the premise that principals need to be instructional leaders in their buildings. . He believes that real leaders are focused on learning. His emphasis would be to help groups of teachers create the conditions for successful learning outcomes, as opposed to instructing them about what they should do individually in the classroom. Student and adult learning would be at the center of the principals' focus in his/her school. Another idea is that teachers need to take a more assertive role in the overall day-to-day running of their buildings. Katzenmeyer and Moller (2001) postulate that teachers actually need to assume roles that were traditionally thought of as those of the principal. This can be done by creating school leadership and correlate teams- each correlate team is responsible for a standard that the school has developed, i.e., instructional leadership, safe and orderly, data collection, etc. The correlates meet on a bi-weekly basis and then report once a month to school administration. Wang and Manning (2000) follow on this concept, indicating that by distributing leadership among a group of stakeholders, schools become more resilient organizations, because regardless of who leaves or goes, improvement can be sustained and developed further by the use of empowerment teams throughout the community.

Summary

Despite the enormous amount of research that has been conducted on occupational and principal stress over the last 40 years, there is at this point in time a dearth of information about principal stress in the NCLB era (2002- present). Still, the research is overwhelmingly consistent in that most stress studies have found an ever-rising feeling of pressure not only in the educational field but the American workforce in general. The literature bears out these strains among educational leaders- the fear of job loss, overwhelming expectations by external and internal forces, long days and low pay, and threats of litigation contribute to a “pressure-cooker” mentality that I believe is causing principals to re-think their careers in education. These findings inform by study because with its imminent reauthorization in the coming year, American principals will still be confronted by the realities of AYP and corrective action sanctions that are the hallmark of the law. I believe that my research will be added to any present literature having to do with principal stress and the strategies that these leaders employ to meet NCLB’s high standards. This case study may hold significance for educational leaders in that the rich data and responses derived from each participant can act a guidepost for successful navigating NCLB’s many challenges, especially in the area of positive colleague support.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Assumptions and Rationale for a Qualitative Design

This qualitative research study focused on how middle school principals are coping with the stresses that come with leading a school since the advent of the NCLB statute in 2002. Specifically, this study sought to elicit the responses of middle level principals whose schools met annual yearly progress goals because of the presence of a confidence interval with one of their subgroups. This study also sought to elicit the perspectives of middle level school administrators and to describe their feelings about the changes that the law has brought to their particular schools. The study also sought to understand the strategies they used in modifying their school's educational environment in order to achieve the annual yearly progress provisions. I elicited feedback from the principals about their attitudes not only about their perspectives as educational leaders but also about the future of education for Pennsylvania and the United States as a whole. I used the qualitative case study methodology as the process to interpret this phenomenon because it provides a vehicle for gathering and analyzing rich, meaningful data. The study also offered real life perspectives into the way principals have been impacted professionally and personally by the No Child Left Behind statute.

The rationale behind a qualitative model for this study can be found in Merriam (1998): the researcher must be interested in understanding the meanings that people have constructed and how they personally make sense of their world. Maxwell (1996) stated that "the strengths of qualitative research derive primarily from its inductive approach,

it's focus on a specific situation or people, and it's emphasis on words rather than numbers". In qualitative research there is also a heavy focus on the "context", the specific environmental influencing their perceptions and behavior. By using the qualitative model, researchers are able to "understand how events, actions and meanings are shaped by the unique circumstances in which these occur (Maxwell, 2004). Yin (1991) stated that a case study is an empirical inquiry that:

- Investigates a contemporary phenomenon within it's real life context, especially when,
- The boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident.

Yin goes on to state that a qualitative researcher "deliberately wants to cover contextual conditions, believing that they would be highly pertinent to the phenomenon that is being studied". An experimental design would remove the phenomenon from its context, so that attention could be focused on a few variables that are controlled by the researcher. Qualitative research, completely opposite from quantitative research, focuses on how all the parts work together as a whole and puts the researcher in a position to study phenomena in their natural settings.

Merriam (1988) also speaks of understanding the process by which events and actions take place, stating "The interest in a qualitative study is the process rather than the outcomes". He also posits that the key concern is understanding the phenomena of interest from the participants' perspectives, not the researcher's (Merriam in Shuman, 2005) Experimental and survey research are often not appropriate at identifying the internal processes that are behind every outcome (Britan, 1978; Maxwell, 2004; Patton,

1990). In my qualitative case study, the outcome is a perceived understanding of a possible increase in principal stress and a completely changed school environment, but the true goal is to find out what processes led to this outcome in the first place.

In this qualitative study, a sample of 10 middle school principals was selected from different middle schools in the four counties that surround the City of Philadelphia. The School District of Philadelphia was also included in this qualitative case study. There are currently 48 middle schools that meet the criteria of achieving AYP whose subgroups were successful because of a confidence interval. I picked a sample from the 48 with five males and five females, and a 33% sample of urban, suburban, and rural school districts.

Yin (2002) stated:

In general, case studies are the preferred strategy when how or why questions are being posed, when the investigator has very little control over events, and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context. (p. 6)

With this statement in mind, I attempted to find out how the implementation of the No Child Left Behind statute has impacted the level of stress a middle school principal feels on a day-to-day basis. I also attempted to have administrators share with me how NCLB has changed the climate in their schools, their personal job satisfaction since the implementation of NCLB, and their feelings about the future of American education.

As a current administrator in a middle school that meets the criteria for this research, this case study will undoubtedly be influenced by my experiences. Having been an administrator since 2004, I have unique first hand knowledge of how NCLB drives the way curricular programming is presented at our school (and the overall district) in which I am currently employed. I looked into this topic to see if the presence of NCLB

sanctions had caused principal stress to increase since 2002. I also delved into the concept that this stress is felt not only by the principal, but the entire school staff, and has had a deleterious effect on principal and teacher morale. In another vein, I wanted to look into whether the NCLB legislation had effected principals who thought they would stay in the profession until retirement are now contemplating a career change. Finally, the NCLB statute has changed the way curricular programs are presented to students, and that principals, as the change agents in their schools, are not completely in agreement with the “intensive” strategies that are currently “en vogue” at area school districts. This dilemma between intensive, constant assessment and the creative, multi assessment model creates a “winner take all” mentality that promotes unhealthy competition between teachers and even neighboring schools in the same district. By interviewing these principals I hoped to retrieve data that were rich and descriptive, and additionally show how these school processes have developed over the past seven years. By doing so, I hoped to illuminate an area of research that has only been addressed on a small tangential level; most of the educational research has focused on how schools are performing as a result of NCLB. There have been several studies about teacher attitudes toward NCLB, but most have been quantitative surveys given by pro-teacher publications (NEA, etc.) and not relevant to determining actual principal stress influenced by NCLB mandates.

The choice of a qualitative design for this research project was appropriate for several reasons. The first reason is the compatibility of the actual qualitative methods, which rely heavily on the interview process in order to collect data. This was compatible with my background as a guidance counselor and my overall comfort when interviewing participants. There is also a practical consideration with choosing this research method. It

was highly important that there was face-to face contact with the principals that I interviewed. The research questions, although dealing with professional topics, could carry emotional weight to them as the subject is a highly charged issue. The same emotional reactions/responses could be elicited from an impersonal survey or stress inventory. The qualitative design also allowed for the address of the intellectual goals I had for this study, which will allow the gathering of information about the principal stress/NCLB connection and possibly fill gaps in previous research. On this point I am confident that any data collected will be useful, as the literature for this subject up to this point has been sparse.

Role of Researcher

I chose to take on this study because I believe it is probably the number one issue overall in American education today. The NCLB mandates have had a tremendous effect on the way school districts educate their children. The law has caused principals to totally rethink the way that they lead their schools. With this rethinking of educational delivery has come the very real face of true accountability, and consequently a new kind of pressure that most educational leaders had not dealt with before. It is this new stress that I wanted to address, and to see how principals are managing their buildings along with their attitudes toward their jobs as the stress continues to build toward the 2014 100% - proficient crescendo. My qualifications include 17 years in the field of K-12 education as a teacher, consultant, guidance counselor, and my current position as an assistant principal in a middle school in suburban Philadelphia. I have a personal stake in this research as my school is one of the AYP proficient schools who were successful because of the confidence interval when measuring sub-groups. I have a Master's degree in

Counseling Psychology and principal certification, both from Temple University; I also have recently completed the course requirements for the doctoral program in Educational Leadership from Temple University and passed the comprehensive examination. I have also completed the requisite Case Study class that will be critical from a qualitative perspective which will help me successfully complete this study.

I think it is also important to mention my extensive background in counseling students, parents and other professionals in my chosen profession. I was a guidance counselor both at the elementary level and secondary level, working with a wide variety of children that ran the gamut of developmental levels. As an assistant principal, I am constantly using my guidance skills in order to reach students and their parents who have made poor choices at our school. In order to reach these kids and their parents, it is imperative that I listen to what they have to say, whether I agree with them or not. Sometimes people just want to be heard, and not necessarily want or crave advice. I believe that using this particular skill with my interviewees helped inform the study in a way that a person of a non- counseling background could not accomplish. I also believe that my experience with evaluating teachers has helped my communication skills become more pro-active instead of reactive. Informing teachers of their strengths and weaknesses without offending them, while getting them to apply any knowledge in order to improve, is a delicate dance. I believe that this non-confrontational, congenial approach helped elicit honest and forthright answers from the interviewees.

It is conceivable that I could have had a built- in bias when conducting this study. This bias is related to the fact that I am already an administrator who works in a school that meets all the criteria for the study. I also have felt the perceived stress of working in

a middle school that has 11 different intensive programs taking place in order to help our sub-groups achieve AYP. It was highly important that I remembered my role as a neutral observer, and my main purpose was to collect information to inform my topic. I am also highly interested in the research topic, which could also lead to a bias toward certain questions and principals who agree (or not agree) with my educational philosophy regarding NCLB. I tried to counteract this built-in bias by sharing my analysis with participants, asking for feedback when appropriate and giving the participants opportunities to clarify their responses. I also monitored my tone of voice during the interview sessions and tried to stay as neutral as possible.

Study Participants

My plan for this particular study was to recruit 10 principals from three types of middle schools in the Delaware Valley area: three principals from suburban schools, four principals from urban areas, and three principals from rural areas. There were five female and five male participants. I believed it was critical to obtain a balanced gender sample as it may account for different coping strategies by each principal. As mentioned previously, there are a total of 77 middle schools that meet the criteria for this research- all of the schools will have met AYP because of the confidence interval factor. The number of schools qualifying under this statistical treatment rose to 29 from the previous year's total of 48 (as seen in table 2). There are 116 middle schools in the counties in and around Philadelphia: 93 of them made AYP; of those 93, 77 had scores in their subgroups below the AYP cut-off (as seen in Table 2).

Table 2: Number of Middle Schools in Five County Area Achieving AYP 2008-2009

7th, 8th and 9th Grade	Chester	Bucks	Montgomery	Delaware	Philadelphia	Total
Number of Middle Schools in each county	19	30	29	16	22	116
Number of Middle Schools that achieved AYP	18	27	27	14	7	93
Middle Schools that achieved AYP because of a confidence interval	16	20	22	13	6	77
Middle Schools that did not make AYP	1	3	2	2	15	23

There were a wide variety of school districts represented by this sample. Radnor, North Penn, Strath Haven, Kennett Consolidated, Avon Grove, Lower Merion, William Penn, Souderton, Wissahickon, Springfield-Delco, Ridley, and Philadelphia are just a few of the districts that met the sub-group/ confidence interval criteria. These school districts represent urban, suburban and rural populations which allowed a wide range of responses from participants. Although technically I did collect demographic information from “rural” school districts, this classification was a misnomer. For example, Kennett Consolidated and Avon Grove are labeled as being “rural” by the Pennsylvania Department of Education because of a formula used to figure out the amount of square miles in a school district compared to people living overall in the community. These two districts, and also West Chester and Downingtown are considered “exburbs” for the

purposes of this study. These areas are growing rapidly and as more and more people move into these communities, the more the term “rural” does not apply. Using Bucks County as a point of reference, 16 middle schools from varying demographics achieved AYP because of the confidence interval in table three; their sub-group demographics were as varied as the districts themselves.

I had hoped that the responses of the participants would be varied and allow conclusions to be drawn about the stress levels of the principals and how they are affected by NCLB.

For the purposes of securing this sample, I used Patton’s (1990) purposeful sampling design. I took the 77 middle schools that were eligible to participate in the study, and put them on lists that were assigned by county. I then picked the first school on each list off each of the columns. I then took the 2nd school name in each of the columns on each of the lists. I checked to make sure that each of the ten schools that were picked had five female principals and five male principals. These 10 schools became my first pool of potential participants. I then sent out an introductory e-mail to these principals explaining who I was and described what the study was about. After two days, I sent out another 10 e-mails to the next round of principals. Out of the initial 10 emails, nine principals responded within one week and agreed to be part of the study (eight suburban, one urban). Using the method I described above, I was able to secure one more principal by the end the third week. Four principals did not respond to my e-mail in any way; one of them was a Philadelphia School District, which had a limited number of schools that made AYP to begin with. I was able to find another middle school within the district that met all the requirements of the study, and this principal agreed to participate.

**Table 3: Bucks County School Districts and Middle School
Performance of Sub-Group Scores on PSSA**

County	School Districts	Middle Schools Eligible because of CI	CI affected sub-group and subject
Bucks	Bensalem	Snyder Middle School	Black- Math
	Bristol Borough	Bristol Middle School	Black- Math
	Bristol Township	Roosevelt Middle School	Black- Reading
	Centennial	Klinger Middle School	Latino- Reading
	Council Rock	Holland MS Newtown MS Rcihboro MS	Special Ed - Math/reading
	Central Bucks	Lenape MS	special ed, reading/math
	Palisades	Palisades MS	Special Ed - Math/reading
	Pennsbury	Charles Boehm MS, Pennwood MS, William Penn MS	Ec Dis- Math Black- math,
	Quakertown	Milford MS Strayer MS	Special Ed - Math
	Penridge	North MS, South MS	Special ed- math, Ec Dis- reading

The plan was to deliberately pick settings, persons and activities that helped the case study derive the most pertinent information available. Weiss (1994) stated that qualitative studies do not use samples as much as they employ panels, “people who are uniquely able to be informative because they are expert in an area or were privileged witnesses to an event”. Light et al, (1990) stated that “with only a limited number of sites, consider purposeful selection, rather than relying on the idiosyncrasies of chance” (p. 53). This strategy worked for the purposes of my study; randomly picking schools would not be an effective strategy considering the specific level of my research topic.

Data Collection Procedures and Sources

Collecting information using a variety of sources and methods is one aspect of what is called triangulation (Maxwell, 2005). Triangulation allows the researcher to gain a broader and more secure understanding of the issues that he or she is investigating. I had hoped that the strategy of comparing different data would enable me to collect as much valid information as possible, thereby strengthening the study. The data collection procedures for this case included formal interviews, researchers’ field notes from school observations, and data retrieval from various public sources. A qualitative research design using these data collection procedures provided the detailed and descriptive data necessary to understand how principals are coping with NCLB stressors.

The strategy for data collection was straight forward- the plan was to gather a large amount of data through the interview process conducted with the 10 principals. Initially, the plan was to use a data base in order to find the schools that meet the eligibility requirements for the study. These data sets are readily available on the Department of Education website under PAAYP.com. I wrote the principals an e-mail by

way of introducing myself and the actual study. In the e-mail I talked about the study, its relevance for real world application, and described in summary fashion the requirements for each participant. Remuneration was offered in the form of a ten dollar gift card to Starbucks Coffee House. After I obtained a secure agreement for participation in the study, I then scheduled the actual interview meeting with the principal in his or her school.

Each participant in the study was interviewed for approximately one hour, one time only. There was not any formal follow –up interviews with the participants, except for when clarification was needed; this was done over the phone or through e-mail. The questions that were asked during the interview were open-ended in nature. The interview itself was audio taped and transcribed by a professional transcribing company. The interview protocol and questions had been meticulously chosen and are sensitive to the needs of the participants, having been approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) and my dissertation committee, who emphasized that the word “ stress” should not be included in any of the questions. Acknowledgement of feelings, knowledge, background information/demographics, values, experience and opinions were part of the interview protocol. The interview was only one part of my visit; I specifically took observational notes about the school and its front office staff. This was done during the time I waited for the interview to start; at all schools I had ample time to observe my surroundings before I spoke with the principal. Finally, the last data collection technique I employed was document review, which could be done at the school with the permission of the administrator depending on the data or document needed. Again, most of the information that I needed regarding NCLB and AYP status is a matter of public record; the only thing

that is not public data are the actual interventions that the principal has employed in order to move their sub-group students toward AYP. From personal experience, it is the unique employment of different instructional strategies that causes discomfort and stress among staff and administration. The use of interviews, review of school documents and data base information retrieval were highly effective techniques in this study because of the copious amounts of data that were collected and the positive way the data answered the research questions.

Data Analysis Procedure

After the interviews were completed and were audio taped, I sent them out to a professional transcriber. I then read the interview transcripts, observational notes and documents. On most days when the interviews occurred, I was able to analyze the data that evening; I would listen to the audio and write down data that I thought would be relevant to the study. After the transcripts came back, I read each one and looked for themes in each of the interviews. Coffee and Atkinson (1996) stated that data should never be collected without substantial analysis going on simultaneously.

For this particular case study, I used the simultaneous data collection and analysis methodology known as the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Initially, I was looking for common themes and characteristics, as well as divergent ideas coming from the analysis of the interviews, observations and data sources. By comparing each data set, I hoped to find similarities or differences; from these categories data emerged, which were then compared with other categories. While reading each transcript, I used several different colored highlighters; I would look for themes among the data and then try to assign it a color. I also would listen to the audiotape at the same time to make

sure I understood exactly what the participant was saying. After exhaustive analysis, seven categories emerged from the data. They are as follows:

- The change of the school culture in the principals' buildings since the advent of NCLB
- The myriad new interventions that occur each day in the buildings, mostly as a result of NCLB
- Staff awareness of the NCLB law and it's impact on them
- Increased presence of central office administration at their schools then before NCLB.
- The interviewees' attitude about NCLB in the future.
- Principal job retention and satisfaction related to NCLB
- NCLB as a "Great Equalizer" between urban and suburban School districts.

The categories were derived directly from the data, and reflected the purpose of the research. This development of categories, properties and tentative hypotheses by me evolved into a core of emerging tentative NCLB theory. This core is a theoretical framework that guides the further collection and analysis of data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

In order to make sense of the reams of data that came from the interviews, I employed the data management concept of coding. I created a large excel poster with the above mentioned seven categories appearing horizontal across the top, and the principals' names listed vertically. I then filled in the data points as they appeared to me from the transcriptions. From this poster, patterns started to emerge. According to Merriam (1998) coding occurs on two levels: identifying information about the data and the interpretive

constructs related to analysis. I did not look to count instances in which questions or answers were the same, but looked to determine their relationship in a broader context related to this study's research questions.

My definition of these phenomena is the perceived stress of principals related to of NCLB mandates. I hypothesized that over the last five years the pressure of meeting NCLB mandates has caused increased stress in school administrators, specifically in schools who have been helped by confidence intervals while making AYP. Based on this hypothesis, I have focused my interview questions on NCLB related issues and any pressure the principals might be feeling as we move toward 2014 and the expectation of 100% proficiency.

I am aware that there are many studies that have dealt with principal stress in a general sense, so the interview questions were designed to go from general issues to more specific ones, such as strategies used in order to help sub-groups and how that has impacted the leadership abilities of the leader. After my interviews were completed, I studied the data in exhaustive fashion and tried to figure out which data fit and which ones don't fit in relation to my hypothesis. For example, when I saw a discrepant piece of data from a principal who says he/she felt that she wanted to quit the profession entirely, I compared that piece of data with another incident, and consequently, tentative categories arose from these comparisons. I continued to do this until a certain ideas started to emerge. Relationships between data points did emerge and that may add to the literature review and theory. However, I am also aware that a new theory may not evolve from this particular data analysis.

Methods of Verification

The overall goal of this case study was to try to understand my questions about principal stress in the No Child Left Behind Era and to illuminate an area of educational research that has not been looked at because the law is relatively new. With that being said, it was very important that I represent all of my participants in the most truthful and accurate way possible. Since human beings are the ones who are administering and participating the study, there is always a potential for different interpretations.

As mentioned previously in this study, my planned use of purposeful sampling for the selection of interview subjects was a solid first step in addressing validity concerns for this case study. However, that is just one step while addressing validity issues for the study. I had planned this case study data collection process to last between six to nine months. This intensive, long term involvement by me and the participants enhanced the depth of the study and provided for opportunities to properly analyze all of the data. Also, being part of a community for a long period of time helped keep me from drawing premature conclusions that are inaccurate or biased. The interviews that I conducted drew a wide variety of responses because the interview questions themselves were open-ended and were created to engage the interviewee in purposeful discussion. I believe that this ensured the collection of rich data, which in turn illuminated the research problem and questions of the study. This included meticulous note taking prior to the actual interview and the use of a professional transcription service to process the actual interviews. Most importantly, it also required me to identify evidence/data that may be contradictory and discuss other possible reasons for these differences.

Another validity strategy I employed in the study is respondent validation. Simply, when I was confused about what a respondent had said or I needed clarification about a particular topic, I did “member checks” (Bryman, 1988), in which I systematically solicited feedback about the data and conclusions from the people I studied (Maxwell, 2005). Keeping in mind that this is nothing more valid than their actual interview responses, I used this check as evidence toward validating (or invalidating) my research questions. I also insured respondent validation by sharing interview transcriptions, field notes and ideas with participating administrators. When the study was concluded, I plan on sharing the final report with all of the participants. Finally, by using multiple interview subjects and a wide variety of methods in order to collect several kinds of data as mentioned previously in this proposal, I believe I have achieved triangulation.

I also tried to address validity threats by searching for discrepant evidence and negative cases in his data (Maxwell, 2005). Instances that cannot be accounted for by a particular interpretation or explanation can point up important defects in that account. When there were discrepant data, I reported it in order to allow the readers to evaluate it and draw their own conclusions.

As previously stated, I may have had built-in biases toward some of the questions being asked during the interview, specifically about my own perceptions of pressure that I have felt as a result of NCLB. In order to address any self-bias, I re- worded the interview questions in a way that redacted any mention of “ stress” in them. In this way I believe any bias I may have felt about NCLB stress was controlled. At all times during this process I tried to be aware of my own biases and not somehow reflect my

expectations or attitudes on the participants of the study. I did not manipulate the progress of the study, and I was aware that my mere presence most likely changed the environment being observed.

I used descriptive statistics in order to organize the data that were collected. These statistics are presented through the use of several Excel charts in the study. I also used mathematical percentages to show relationships (positive or negative) between each of the participants' answers to the interview questions. These descriptive statistics provided information that was pertinent to the study and helped to support its validity by demonstrating a sound interview sample and accurate interview questions. The interview questions then correlated in a positive way with the overall research questions. In addition to these strategies, I had regular meetings with the dissertation chairperson and the other members of my committee to discuss any issues, emerging themes or concerns that may arise during the time that this study was being conducted.

Ethical Issues

When following IRB protocols, the main point that I was concerned about was the actual interviews with the principals. An informed consent notice was developed for each of the participating principals to read and sign before going forward with the study. This informed consent document was clearly descriptive and contained all key facts of the study must be spelled out to them. Although not technically a vulnerable population, they may still be putting themselves in a compromised position if they do not agree with school district's philosophy of NCLB management. Privacy and confidentiality must be guaranteed if I was to acquire the data needed to make this a legitimate case study.

In this particular case study I used a coded system that identified participants through the use of an individual number. Using this strategy, the participants then could only be identified by me. I used this number system before I got the transcriptions back from the company I had hired to do the transcribing. When I started the actual transcription analysis, I created pseudonyms for all of the participants. Since audiotapes were used, I guaranteed to the interviewees that the tapes will be stored in a specific safe with a combination only know to me and kept in a private office. Overall, the risk factor is low for this population, as the probability of harm or injury is low, and all of the participants are highly educated adults who would have at the very least a modicum of interest in the study.

Outcome of This Study and Its Relation to Theory and Literature

This dissertation has three main literature strands that helped illuminate the research in this field and answered my two overarching questions about principal stress in the NCLB era. The study has shed light on principal stress that is directly related to the NCLB statute and provided insight into how principals have reacted to this event. The knowledge gained from this study could be used to review and develop effective plans for principal readiness in educational leadership programs throughout the country.

The first literature strand in this dissertation dealt with the NCLB legislation and its general effect on American schools since it came into law in 2002. The description of NCLB and the overarching AYP mandate that comes as an accountability measure is a critical part of the case study as it informs the reader of the rather brief but tumultuous history of this law. This literature is expanding daily as more schools are affected by

NCLB and the AYP mandates written into the law. Most of this literature are narrative descriptions and are informative in nature; they are not analysis or research based.

My second literature strand described actual principal stress and its relation to NCLB. Using past studies completed about general principal stress, I wanted to determine if the pressure principals felt in the past has been eclipsed by the stress arising from this legislation. Namely, has the pressure of NCLB has upped the ante considerably for the school leader and in some respects have had a negative impact on job satisfaction and a consideration of career change for principals. This part of the study was investigative in nature and sought to open up an area of research which has not yet been examined.

The researcher's third literature strand focused on the presence of stress in organizations and the individuals who work in these environments. These studies indicate that the presence of stress generally has a negative impact of the organization and has had serious implications for its employees, especially from a medical/health perspective (Welmers,2005). This study attempted compare these stress reactions to those in educational institutions, specifically principals who, according to the NCLB statute, are one AYP failure of a sub-group away from being placed on corrective action I or II

From an overall organizational theoretical perspective I focused on the decision-making theory of Punctuated Equilibrium (PE) and its relation to NCLB. P E's main concept of "fits and starts" is a good description of NCLB's effect on American schools and could also be extrapolated to the individual stress levels of the schools used in the case study. I believe that PE's tenets were apparent in this study, as some schools have adapted nicely to NCLB demands while others appear as if they are being dragged along.

The concluding paradox of PE is the fact that there has yet to be a “settling” down of this policy change. It keeps moving forward, and in doing so continues to apply even more stress to schools and their principals.

This study also addressed principal stress related to NCLB will further clarify this phenomenon when comparing known occupational stress theories such as the demand-control model and role conflict/role ambiguity model. Much research has been focused on stress in the workplace; this study will attempt to look at NCLB as an outside force exerting pressure from all perspectives inside a middle school building, and the many reactions a principal may have when addressing it. This study will add those components to the literature on existing work related stress literature and inform the nascent field of NLCB as principal stressor.

Overall, this case study informs the reader about principal stress re: NCLB mandates and it’s affect on overall job satisfaction. At the very least, the study provides data that up to this point has not been focused upon by educational researchers, probably because NCLB is a fairly new mandate and the real repercussions of the law have not been felt by the typical suburban school district. Over the next two or three years, specifically in 2012 when the math and reading mandates jump to 86%, large numbers of schools will find themselves on the corrective action lists and experiencing the accompanying stress that comes with that distinction.

Summary

This study makes a relevant contribution to the field of educational leadership; the responses of the participants stand alone in a qualitative way and provide an insight into the daily lives of these principals in their respective buildings. While this study cannot be

generalized to the overall educational population, many procedures were used in order to secure interval validity. (1) The participants were carefully chosen from over 96 principals whose middle schools met the overall criteria of having met AYP for the 2008-2009 school years. It was then determined that 77 middle schools met the more specific requirement of achieving AYP through the use of a confidence interval. From this pool the ten candidates were selected using the purposeful sampling method, controlling for gender. (2) The interview questions were created in a way that intentionally left out the word “stress” and allowed the participants to have wide latitude when discussing any number of topics that were pertinent to the study. The questions were general in nature but specific enough in content to allow for multiple responses by the different administrators; this helped the researcher avoid bias in the interview process. (3) The use of respondent or “member checks” was employed when there was a need for further clarification of participant answers. All of the interviews were transcribed and checked for their accuracy with the participants when the researcher felt it was necessary or needed clarification.

CHAPTER 4

DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS

This study had as its focus two major areas of concentration. First, the impact of the NCLB statute on middle school principal stress levels was studied. These principals are leaders of schools that had achieved AYP on the PSSA assessments, but only because of a statistical treatment known as a confidence interval. If not for this intervention, these schools would have been placed on the NCLB warning list, or placed into corrective action I, another sanction allowable under the statute. Second, the instructional interventions of each school related to their AYP status were examined, with a focus on how these interventions impacted the stress levels and job satisfaction of the principals interviewed. The results of this study are exhibited through three primary sources: interviews, documents and personal observations of the middle schools.

Ten principals were interviewed for this study. Eight of these principals were educational leaders in the suburbs of a major metropolis on the East Coast. The suburban principals worked in districts that surrounded the metropolis on three sides and had student populations that varied widely in demographics and socio-economic status. Two principals operated their schools in an urban environment. Although their students had roughly the same socio- economic status, they had a wide diversity in their ethnic and cultural backgrounds. The ten principals were split up evenly by gender- five male and five female.

Seven of these middle schools buildings were at least 40 years old, with several having had major renovations completed to their facilities at some point in their

existence. These renovations included the addition of modulars for extra classroom space, new office areas and remodeled IMC's / computer facilities. Another one of the participating schools was 25 years old, and the remaining two facilities were ten and twelve years old. Despite their age, the older schools had a very welcoming feel to them and a brightly lit, cheery main office area. All of the staff members that I encountered during the interview process were very helpful and accommodating; all were aware of my appointments and made my stay a very pleasant, memorable experience. The same can be said of the newer middle school buildings; both main office areas were large, modern and were highly efficient centers of administration. The office staff and the faculty members with whom I interacted were incredibly welcoming.

In October of 2009, I sent out an email to the first ten middle school principals selected out of the 77 that were eligible to participate in the study using the purposeful sampling method. These principals were selected throughout the immediate five county area (Delaware, Bucks, Montgomery and Chester) and the City Philadelphia. These ten principals/schools were selected from an overall list of middle schools that had made AYP in the 2009-2009. In this e-mail I explained the nature of this study and invited each principal to speak with me personally to see if they would be interested in participating. After 2 days of waiting for responses, I then selected ten more schools and sent e-mails to them as well. Within a week, I had collected nine positive responses (eight suburban/exurban and one urban) and had set up times to meet with these principals. It took three more weeks, however, to secure the one interview that I needed from the urban environment. In the final tally, I received sixteen total positive responses, and four no reply responses. I did send follow up e-mails three times to certain schools

because I believed that they would have been compelling educational environments to include in the study, but there was no response from them, and I used the schools that had agreed to participate.

The principals came from many different professional backgrounds, and all had varying levels of graduate level schooling and professional development. All had Masters Degrees with additional graduate credits; three had received their doctorates in education. Table 4 shows the demographic information of all ten participants. Their names have been replaced by pseudonyms for the purposes of this study. When I arrived to interview the principals, they signed all of the consent forms necessitated by the IRB protocols. This included General Consent Forms, and Audio-Tape forms.

All of the ten middle schools that participated in the study had achieved AYP for the 2008-2009 school years. Seven had made AYP for several years running; two had been on warning before but had made it back to proficiency. All had students of varying levels of Socioeconomic Status, Free and Reduced lunch, and varying cultural demographics. All had at least one sub-group achieve AYP because of a confidence interval (See Table 5).

Table 4: Participant Demographics

Principal (pseudonym)	Educational Background	Years of Experience	School Population
Sally	Doctorate	22- 11 as principal	870
April	Masters plus 60	40- 12 as principal	1000
Nick	Masters plus 30	18- 9 as principal	1100
Jackie	Doctorate	30- 7 as principal	950
Marty	Doctorate	13 - 4 as principal	1350
Vera	Masters plus 30	27- 9 as principal	1000
Pat	Masters plus 30	23- 5 as principal	890
Larry	Masters plus 30	38- 11 as principal	1000
Robert	Masters plus 30	24 - 10 as principal	890
Mack	Masters plus 30	31- 10 as principal	1500

Table 5: School Demographics

Principal (pseudonym)	Socio-Economic Status of School	sub-group population concern and subject	Made AYP last two years?
Sally	mid SES , 15% free and reduced lunch	special education-reading	Yes
April	lower SES, 77% of school F&R lunch	special ed, Ec dis, African American, Hispanic-math, reading	No
Nick	mid to low SES, 37.4 % F&R lunch	ec dis- reading	Yes
Jackie	High SES, 11.3 F&R lunch	special ed math	Yes
Marty	low to mid SES, 19 % F & R lunch	special education-math ec dis reading	Yes
Vera	High SES<5 F & R lunch	special ed- math	Yes
Pat	Low to Mid SES, >20 % F & R lunch	Ec Dis math	No
Larry	High SES < 5 % lunch	special ed readingspecial ed reading/math	Yes
Robert	High SES< 10% F& R lunch	special ed reading/math	Yes
Mack	Low to Mid SES 56% F& R lunch	special ed reading-safe harbor	Yes

Nine of the schools were set up in a traditional middle school format, which varied between sixth, seventh and eighth grade, or seventh, eighth and ninth grades. There was one participating entity which was a K-8 school that was split down the middle in a lower school- middle school format. All of the middle schools that participated had varying student populations; the smallest school had 800 students, the largest contained 1550.

The data from this study came from three sources- interviews with the principals, direct observations of the researcher, and documents from each of the participating

schools. First, a forty five to sixty minute interview was conducted with each principal in October 2009. The interviews consisted of approximately seven open ended questions focusing on how they felt their school has/ or has not changed since the advent of the NCLB legislation. The interviews were transcribed from audiotapes and reviewed for accuracy of information. Principals were notified if there were any questions about their responses during the interview and opportunities were given to verify information when needed. This data were then put on an Excel Poster and analyzed for patterns of responses. Color coding of the data occurred and commonalities among principal responses were noted. Documents that were shared with me by the principals were also analyzed for commonalities/differences across the schools. My last data collection strategy was direct observations of each school environment. I wrote down notes as I waited for the interview to start, and also took notice of the overall environment of the schools.

The results of the data for this study are categorized by common themes that emerged from the interviews with the principals. They are divided into two strands: The first section addresses the overall impact that NCLB has had on their schools. This section includes the following sub-categories: the growing job stress of principals and how it relates to their own job retention; organizational structure changes in their own schools as a result of the NCLB legislation; increasing external pressures on middle schools because of NCLB; NCLB as the “Great Equalizer” from the urban/suburban perspective; and perceptions of principals regarding the future of NCLB. The second strand is categorized by the interviewee’s responses grouped according to the common predictors of age, work experience and gender. The results of these data sets are each

reported in a summary fashion with direct quotes being used to convey the interviewee's feeling about each particular topic.

Vignettes

The following are vignettes that are designed to give the reader a representative picture of what it is like to be a middle school principal during the NCLB era. These data sets allow the reader to experience what it would be like during a day in the life of an educational leader trying to juggle dozens of responsibilities while pleasing a myriad of interest groups that may love her one day and despise her the next. Although these vignettes are aggregated to a certain extent, the ideas that are conveyed in each of them are the actual experiences of the principals who I have interviewed for this study. They have either conveyed these experiences to me during the interviews or I have witnessed them through direct observation.

A New Year at Wood Middle School

It was 6:15 AM and the sun had still not come up as Sally pulled her car into the parking space marked "Principal" in front of her school. This was her 11th year at Woods Middle School and she could still not believe how quickly the time had come and gone. Today was the first day of school for the staff and she would have to explain the myriad changes that had occurred to the master schedule from the previous year. The idea of explaining the changes did not scare Sally; she had been in these pressure packed situations before and knew that in order for her success depended in the way she delivered the news to her anxious, stressed out teachers. She knew how they felt; after learning that Wood had barely made AYP by the slimmest of margins the previous June, Sally went through a gamut of emotions in 24 hours that would keep a psychoanalyst

busy for months. First, she felt relief. Then she felt anger. Then she felt a little sick when it hit her that the pressure was not going to end; on the contrary it was only beginning. Not only would the special education subgroup that didn't make annual yearly progress at Wood be measured again next year by the PSSA, the cut scores would elevate another ten points. This meant that she and her staff would have to work doubly hard to help these needy students not only master basic skills, but be proficient on a test that she believed was set up for them to fail in the first place.

The educational changes during those 11 years at Wood were enough to make Sally's head spin. Before becoming a principal, Sally had spent 10 years as a professional developer and assistant principal for several school districts in a neighboring county. During those formative years in her career, the atmosphere in the main office of her school was one of loose camaraderie and a focus on managing the nuts and bolts of the building. Little if any attention was focused on sub groups or breaking down data; if the overall scores were good for the school, that is what counted. School days consisted of teachers instructing whatever they felt like in their subject area; there was little oversight and no one really cared. There were plenty of time for spirit days and energetic assemblies; kids, teachers and administrators all had a lot of fun at school. Sure, there were serious academic goals to be reached; but in the end, there really wasn't any specific benchmark that needed to be met and the State had zero consequences set for school districts that performed poorly on standardized tests. Now, PDE wielded a significant consequence stick; it loomed over her school in the form of the No Child Left Behind legislation and its annual yearly progress mandate for all students.

Now on this day, Sally would present four months of work that culminated in the creation of the master schedule for the school. In all of her years as an educator, Sally had never tackled a bigger project than the one she would present later today. With an eye toward precision and perfection (she had a doctorate in reading and also worked as a reading specialist before her administrative career), Sally had created a schedule that included no less than 12 intensive classes for the special education sub-group. When asked by central office administration about the major focus on the special education population in the schedule, Sally did not blink an eye when explaining her rationale—the scores were low, the school was almost put on AYP warning, and she was not going to let it happen under her watch if she could possibly help it. This complete philosophy change was not lost on Sally, who 15 years earlier had focused most of her attention on homogeneous grouping within middle schools and disciplining wayward students. Now, over the past five years, she had become the instructional leader of the school, and would have to sell this new and demanding schedule to her faculty, who were growing more and more weary of the NCLB demands and the pressurizing effect it had on their school. Sally would be explaining to staff that the days of getting 8th period coverage in order to pick up a sick child were over; all staff would be needed to cover classes or serve in some intervention strategy. No one was spared; specialist teachers would now be covering homerooms and the Opportunity to Learn period at the end of the day; assistant sport coaches who were used to leaving in the middle of 6th period to attend away games would now be asked to drive their own cars to games after school ended. Most importantly and even more controversial, all special education self-contained classes would be dissolved and absorbed into regular education subjects that mirrored PSSA content. This move was

actually made by Sally five years before (she considered herself a risk taker) in an effort to get a jump on selling the inclusion project to the regular education teachers; now there role would become even more important, as well as make them the busiest teachers in the district. Still, having been a professional developer in the past had helped her; she had 25 years of educational grouping research on her side and knew that she could face a barrage of questions from frustrated teachers and still hold her own.

The pressure that Sally faced in creating this intensive schedule paled in comparison to the concern she felt for the students at Wood that couldn't read. This drove her to design programs and gather research and implement programs that lesser principals would be scared to implement for fear of angering their staff. With a wealth of experience on her side, she was neither scared nor concerned about the staff reaction. She would present the changes in a matter of fact way that drew the focus on the kids that needed it the most. This was the way that it had to be, take it or leave it. She had been in education too long to be intimidated by her staff or by the laws that governed education in her home state. As she got out of her car and looked at her school for the first day of this New Year, Sally felt more than confident that she and her staff could handle the pressure of NCLB *and* get kids to learn how to read and do math. This singular focus has kept Sally focused throughout her educational career and she certainly was not going to change now because of the law and its sanctions. She loved her job and would be at Wood until someone walked her out the door; until then her job was to help kids acquire the tools they needed to be successful in life.

Going Off to War

Lisa got off of the phone, a little shell – shocked, a little miffed at the information that she just received from her regional superintendent. Apparently, without anyone telling her until five minutes ago, Lisa would be hosting eighty- five “learning coordinators” at her school the following day, and would have to come up with eighty five boxed lunches so they could eat with her staff. The irony was not lost on Lisa one bit. Twenty five minutes before she got the call from the regional superintendent about the new recruits to her school, she had found out via e-mail from food services that they had lost the staff lunches- they were somewhere on the other side of the city! After several frantic phone calls to contacts that Lisa had made during her career in the district, the lunches were found and were going to be delivered tomorrow. Lisa thought about this one crisis in about one hundred since the start of the day; she was not sure if she could take another bureaucratic snafu that her district seemed to dish out with regularity. Still, she thought that the next day’s professional development was critical for her teachers, and had fought to get as much professional development in her building as possible. The more that she could expose her staff to new educational ideas and strategies, the more her students had a chance to succeed.

The truth of the matter is that Lisa thought the lunch problem was “small potatoes” compared to the trials and tribulations that she had experienced in a career that spanned 40 years, all in the same urban school district. Trained as a special education teacher and a 29 year veteran of the classroom, she prided herself on her ability to take a “diagnostic” or “prescriptive” approach toward identifying students with learning needs. She had come to Vaughn Middle School as an assistant principal 11 years prior, after

insisting that she never wanted to be a principal. Vaughn was across the street from her house; how could she not take the job? Little did Lisa know how the neighborhood around Vaughn would change; within 10 years her school demographics went from 95 percent Caucasian to the present level of not meeting the sub –group threshold for AYP (less than 40). In that period of time, Vaughn’s PSSA scores have fluctuated wildly, with some years making AYP while other years they have found themselves on warning and corrective action one. The PSSA scores were not the only thing to fluctuate in her school district; educational leaders have come and gone, introducing their specific brand of “reform” only to leave for greener pastures. This inconsistency of leadership is stressful to her staff, especially with the emergence of the present superintendent, who has openly called for teacher and principal firings if the scores do not improve. Indeed, Lisa still recalls a recent meeting with a regional superintendent where she was asked why a particular teacher had not been written up because of low benchmark scores. Her response was honest and straight forward; she respectfully told her boss that she could not in good conscience write up a teacher who consistently constructs and implements effective lesson plans, regardless of her benchmark scores. The superintendent’s response was “wrong answer!”. Still, she held her ground and insisted that if the school district expected to write teachers up, she would have to provide them with effective professional development first, something that they are sorely lacking in at this point in time. She will battle for staff and proclaims that they will follow her to Hawaii if she told them to get ready for a long trip; all of them together would figure out a way to get to Hawaii, and go through the seven seas to accomplish their goal. Lisa uses the metaphor to describe her staff’s dedication to their students; still, the pressure is immense to produce scores.

Lisa also knew that although the professional development was good for her staffers, it was hurting her because it was one less day that she could get into the classroom and observe teachers. The school district had started a new initiative where she was expected to do a minimum of three formal observations a day. Each took at least an hour and a half in the room and then another half hour to do the summary and post observation. This was on top of her daily case load of parent meetings and student discipline. The new paperwork requirements were directly tied into NCLB performance goals, with the expectation that the more a principal got into the classroom to observe a teacher, the more the principal could influence positive instruction. Lisa agreed with this premise on its face, but thought it to be completely unrealistic considering the challenges that her teachers and students face each day.

There was one more thing that rankled Lisa on this day- she had received her school district "report card" and found out that she had gotten an "F" on her facilities audit- she had called down to complain that no one had been out to the school, so how could she have gotten a F since a lot of the school was new construction? Within 24 hours the grade was changed to a "B" with no explanation. This arbitrary change on this report card and the dozen other categories that are also listed have tended to give Lisa a jaundiced view of the district and the systems that have in place to monitor growth.

Still, she refuses to quit. Lisa knows that her staff needs her leadership and experience, and she will give it to them as long as the district lets her stay. She also is encouraging staff members to take classes and become principals, as she believes that the profession needs young blood to carry it into the future. However, she sees bleak things for the field of education if No Child Left Behind is not modified in some way for

subgroups. She believes that the pressure will become too much not only for administrators but also their respective staffs. With that said, Lisa will continue working day by day to help the kids of Vaughn Middle School meet their goals and succeed in life.

A Very Public Position

David remembers the meeting like it was yesterday. It was like being in the twilight zone. The person in front of his desk was talking animatedly about AYP and corrective action lists, but at this point David had tuned out completely. Devastated by what he was hearing, he excused himself out of his *own* office and went outside into Bloomington Middle School's courtyard so he could take a break from what was happening inside. Just 10 minutes before, he had an impromptu visit by his assistant superintendent of curriculum. Without hesitating, the administrator had gotten directly to the point: he wanted answers about the school's precipitous drop from blue ribbon school to being on the warning list for schools who had not met AYP. In a matter of 12 months, David's school had gone from making annual yearly progress for 5 straight years to being the only middle school to not achieve its yearly benchmark. The superintendent was clearly unhappy with the school's performance and demanded to see a comprehensive plan within the month that would remedy this predicament. David honestly had never seen this coming; his school had made AYP for all of those years with nary a blip on their standardized scores. How did this happen? As he began to wonder not only about the future of his school but his own job security, it became obvious to David that he needed to make serious changes in his building- he just wasn't sure how that was going to happen.

Flash forward two years later. In the space of 24 months, David had implemented several sweeping instructional initiatives that shook the school to its core. No longer just a school manger, David had undergone rigorous professional development over the course of a year to get up to speed with the latest instructional techniques. After this intensive training, David set out to impart this knowledge to the staff, recruiting several teachers who he had implicit trust in their ability to deliver the instructional techniques. Over this time, David instituted professional learning communities, which increased the number of times per week teaching professionals could interact and discuss instructional techniques. David endeavored to visit classrooms on a formal and informal basis and give feedback to all of his teachers in a timely fashion. He co-taught lessons with regular education and special education students. Faculty meetings became impromptu in-services where teachers shared their latest and greatest techniques to help kids learn. He sends out on-line surveys in order to get a feel for how the teachers feel the initiatives are going and adjusts accordingly to the feedback. The staff was presented with these changes at a raw, emotion filled first day faculty meeting in which the numbers were laid out for them; this was the first time in David's tenure that raw data were presented as a starting point for the school year.

All of these changes came at an enormous price for David. He now spends much more time at school in the evenings, working on programs that two years prior had not existed at his school. This new schedule of late nights has affected his marriage and his relationship with his young children. He is much more stressed out than he ever was before and admits that the specter of NCLB looms large in the back of his mind. He does

not want to lose his job because of what he considers *his* failure to raise the sub-group scores at his school. He now has high blood pressure, which cannot be traced to any genetic foundation. He believes it's related to the stress of meeting NCLB requirements. When he found out that his school did not make AYP, he took it personally, so much so that he wrote a letter to the community explaining the cut scores, emphasizing that all but one sub-group had achieved annual yearly progress. Still, when the newspapers reported the PSSA results, Bloomington was branded as a failing school. This characterization hurt David; he felt the media was demonizing his school and failed to recognize that for five straight years they were one of the highest schools in the county.

The good news is, Bloomington Middle School made AYP last year. They picked up their subgroup score where they had fallen down in the previous year. For David, the scores were a vindication of his hard work in changing the school's culture. Still, he knows that he has to produce successful scores this year, and is looking at 100% proficiency for the entire school by 2014, a prospect that gives him pause. He probably would consider another career at this point, but has close to twenty years in the system- this may be a determining factor in whether he stays or goes. The shock of being put on the warning list still is with David, but it is tempered by the knowledge that he has instituted successful interventions at his school which are helping kids. From that perspective, the NCLB sanctions served as a wake up call to himself and his staff. When all is said and done though, he still must produce, and that is a stress that he would rather do without, believing in his heart that the law is inherently unfair. David has spoken with his central office staff about trying to influence legislators to enact growth models for sub groups, but doesn't hold out much hope of that actually happening. Still, he will not give

up- not yet, at least. He says to come and visit him in 2014 and he'll probably have a clearer picture of his future if his school is 100% advanced and proficient; if they aren't he thinks his district will probably show him the door. He is already thinking of new careers that he may want to pursue, just in case the worst happens.

Discussion of the Findings

The Growing Pressure on Principals and Job Retention

Tomic and Tomic (2008) have posited that the stress on principals complying with NCLB regulations has been enormous and believe that the demands of meeting AYP is causing a large turnover in the profession. Welmers (2005) has specifically described stresses that have been placed on schools and what roles these stress play in job satisfaction and retention.

Eckman (2006) describes the specific, complex work of the school principal and the changes that have occurred in the position over the last two decades. In particular, principals are required to:

- Be instructional Leaders
- Close the Achievement Gap
- Respond to Accountability measures
- Meet the needs of students with disabilities
- Report to State and Federal Agencies
- Provide support to parents in need
- Respond to increased demands for home-school communication
- Maintain safe school environments
- Ensure all students achieve on standardized tests

- Act as change agents
- Provide visionary leadership in schools desperately in need of new directions.

In addition, job complexity, isolation from other administrative colleagues with similar job responsibilities, the loner existence of the principal, problems assimilating to a new school culture and role conflict all contribute to principal stress and have been linked to the national shortage of qualified principals (Lashaway in Shuman, 2007). King (2002) cited the immense importance of the principal as instructional leader, a person who is able to collect and use data from a variety of sources and respond to the new accountability standards in a positive and proactive way.

All of the school districts and principals who participated in this study have been affected by the NCLB legislation; indeed, the Pennsylvania Department of Education has aligned its state mandates to coincide with all of the federal regulations encompassed in NCLB . All of the 500 school districts that make up the educational system in Pennsylvania take part in annual tests known as PSSA. This is a non- negotiable event that has brought together unlikely friends in a quest to figure out the best way to educate children while still passing the exam. Urban, rural and suburban districts and their principals convene meetings together in order to discuss successful intervention efforts for their students. All school leaders feel the stress of meeting NCLB requirements and are struggling each day to make their schools productive educational environments for their students.

Still, even with all of the research and data on principal stress compiled over the last five years, 90% of the administrators interviewed for this study felt that they would

never consider quitting their jobs just because of the presence of NCLB and its impending reauthorization. To some of them, they viewed this question as a personal affront. It was almost as if the challenge of NCLB and its inherent mandates were not going to stand in their way of being an effective educational leader. Indeed, all of them said that the main reason they would stay was to finish the job they had started, which was to help to kids learn and grow into successful adults. Larry, the principal of Brookside Middle School, said:

I have been in education for 38 years and will finish my career here as a principal in this building. I will be staying- I am not going to leave or get into some other profession because of a law- I come in here at 6:00 AM and I leave here at 6:00 PM and I've never lost the bug to help kids teach and learn.

Mack, a 40 year educator at Murellsborough Middle School in Murellsborough City, voiced similar thoughts, but had a slightly different take on the pressure he feels from NCLB. Said Mack,

I love my job and I do it for the kids, and that's the only reason while I am here, pure and simple. I would never get out of the profession because of NCLB nor would I ever tell another teacher to avoid becoming a principal because of it. The pressure will always be there, at 3 o' clock in the morning, it never leaves, and you hope and pray that you do enough and it will be enough. But the reason to do this job is so you can try to create a culture of love in your school, and you do that by loving your students and loving your staff and helping kids, not worrying about a law that is unfair to begin with.

Some principals had come from the business world, or had been in education and left, and then came back again when they realized that the rewards in the outside work world were not as glamorous as first thought. These back- and- forth perspectives about leaving the profession were more grounded as their experiences in a non-education profession gave them skills to look at NCLB as a kind of business deadline or another sales goal. Robert, principal of Rice Middle School, was emphatic that the stress level

brought by NCLB was not much different than non-educational stressors, stating that “the pressure felt in academia is not that different from the business world- the grass is sometimes greener only over the septic tank”! As a 24 year educator, Robert had the hindsight to realize that “it wouldn’t make sense to panic just yet because the pendulum might be swinging back to a less pressurized system, a middle ground where things are reasonable again”. Another principal, Jackie, from Tipton Middle School was a teacher, then a reporter for a major newspaper, and then came back to the education field. She says that she would not dream of changing careers because “she has done that already and loves the education business”. She also said that the NCLB law is “just another challenge, and that to be a successful principal you have to find creative ways to get around it”. The outside experiences of these administrators have given them a unique perspective on NCLB but in the end their responses to staying in the profession are similar to their colleagues who haven’t been in any other profession but education: they wouldn’t quit for the world and hope to continue into the future and help kids learn.

Organizational Structure Changes in Schools Related to NCLB

One of the main focuses of the NCLB legislation is its emphasis on creating positive, lasting changes in America’s schools. (Debray, 2006). This is taking place in numerous ways, including specialized teacher professional development, higher certification standards, a more precision- based focus on curriculum matching up with standards, and the creation of intensive programs to support each school’s neediest students (Bernhardt, 2008). Invariably, as these changes are implemented throughout our schools, pressure for students to succeed and for educators to deliver a proficient “product” has grown at an exponential level.

All of the administrators that participated in this study said that their master schedules have been drastically changed by the demands of NCLB. Whereas in the past, administrators could focus on big picture scheduling issues such as creating encore subject sections and study halls, now the emphasis is much different. The need to include all of the special education populations into the general curriculum has caused regular education classrooms to balloon in size and require some type of team teaching model. This in turn has caused deep concern from teachers who feel they are not equipped to work in this type of combined level (regular and special education together) environment. This concern is then pushed back up to the principals, who must figure out a way to provide pertinent professional development for their respective staffs while ensuring that each student is getting all of their educational needs satisfied. These “growing pains” are evident in a majority of the schools in which I interviewed. Sally of Woods Middle School commented that,

The last two summers have been the most difficult master schedules I have had to create in 20 years of being a principal. Intensive math and reading classes for non proficient students, early and late math academies and the inclusion model have made for a difficult schedule that seems to get more complicated as we get farther down the NCLB road. The changes are especially difficult for the older teachers as they are used to a more top-down, black and white approach to instructional delivery. NCLB has changed all of that.

Robert stated that as a result of NCLB his district had completely scrapped their entire reading and math curricula in search of something that would better align with state standards. This change required a complete retraining of staff and caused massive consternation and worry throughout the district. The principals reported that all of these new endeavors placed added stress on the teachers which then in turn fell back to them.

Another major focus of change among the principals who were interviewed occurred in the way sub-groups were now being educated in their schools. One of the more controversial aspects of NCLB is the inclusion of sub-groups as a measurement score in order to achieve AYP. Proponents argue that every child should be able to learn no matter what their disability or challenge is; opponents say it unfairly penalizes schools by focusing on one day tests as opposed to growth over a whole school year. Either way, schools across America must find ways to help these populations learn and be successful. Five out of the ten principals interviewed specifically mentioned the achievement gap as a major focus of their school improvement efforts. Mack emphasized that his school had “37 different subgroups to address, the most in the entire state”.

Interventions for these students at Mack’s school ranged from a broad- based intervention system for tracking students all the way down to individualized computer based study island math programs. Larry and Robert emphasized an all –around focus on teaching “literacy skills across all curricular areas and looking for gaps in achievement through the consistent checking of data derived from the assessments”. Pat said that inclusion is the norm for these kids and at this point in time there were zero self-contained classrooms in her school. One of the more veteran principals who were interviewed was candid in her assessment of her school’s previous attempts to help these sub-groups become successful. Looking back over 20 years, Sally recalled numerous times when “lip service was paid to these groups in September, and a big initiative would start, but with no stick to make her follow through, these initiatives invariable fell to the wayside”. Now with the law and PDE monitoring her school’s every move, she has no

choice not only to design these new programs into a master schedule, but sell it to her staff and successfully implement it. In her words, “school is just not fun anymore”.

An interesting sub-text that came out of the job retention question was the role of legislators in the field of education. To a person, all of the principals thought that there was too much government oversight in the business and their interference was contributing to the stress level in their schools and, more specifically, their jobs. Most had taken a wait and see attitude about NCLB and its authorization, but some were not afraid at all of the legislators in Harrisburg and Washington D.C. Said Vera, a 30 year veteran of education and principal of Basking Middle School said, “ I have been in this business for a long time, and I believe that one way or another we have always been beholden to the legislators, so that’s probably not going to change, and therefore not something that I should really get worried about as far as a career changer- I will stay for as long as they will have me”! Mack added, “The politicians have no idea what they are doing, and know nothing about real education, yet here we are. But you know what; I am not going to let it rule my life. The politicians put it there, but life goes on”.

There was one principal who did not share the perspectives of her peers when it came to considering a new career as a reaction to NCLB stress. Pat, who is principal of Bergey Middle School, was very frank about her considerations of starting a new business that would take her out of the education field all together. Pat said, “The shame of it is I have considered getting out of the field, because the stress is immense and never really ends. I have a thankless job, I have high blood pressure, all the fingers point to me and I would not recommend this job to anyone. It wears on you at night when you come home and you are in your car, it’s not good for your health”. Pat was much focused on

the test scores and stated that “you work your hardest on the test scores and you wait for them to come out once a year, and it is too much pressure”. Even with this non-endorsement of the profession, Pat still stated that she has a true love of being an educator that was driven by service and helping kids grow. As a 19 year veteran, it genuinely hurt her to have the negative attitude about the field, and said that it could change if her school continued making AYP.

Increased External Pressures on Middle Schools as a Result of NCLB

It has already been established in the literature review that the pressure on schools to produce and be accountable for the students they educate has increased exponentially over the past decade. There are internal pressures, such as intensive interventions and philosophy changes that have the potential to cause tension or stress in a school’s learning environment. New external pressure on school districts, specifically from governmental intervention, has become the rule rather than the exception. So it is not surprising that the pressures exerted by the NCLB legislation reach beyond the school walls and into the central office of school districts. All of the principals interviewed for this study said that they had more direct contact with central office employees now (assistant superintendants, directors of curriculum) than they had in the past. Most of these meetings were focused on direct interventions related to students who did not meet AYP requirements for the previous year. None of the principals interviewed said that their direct salary was tied to the performance scores of their students; however, they could be rated unsatisfactory if their PSSA scores are non proficient which in turn would affect their job security within their school district.

All of the urban principals reported that informal meetings had been replaced by weekly or bi-weekly intervention sessions where the principal would have to talk about the intervention strategies that were happening in the school. They also would have to specify how it was either helping or hurting the identified students. “Hurting” would be described as not making adequate gains on any number of assessments that were given to the students. April, who is a principal at Deerly Middle School in Murrelsborough City, described a central office meeting in the summer as a “pressure packed, anxiety laced meeting in which each of the principals were told to get the scores up or you are fired”. During that same meeting April also said that principals were encouraged to write up and eventually fire teachers whose classrooms were tied to poor PSSA scores. April also reports regular meetings during the school year in which individual teachers are called out by regional supervisors for low benchmark scores, again pressuring her to write them up as poor teachers, something she has flatly refuses to do. Mack, another urban principal, seconded April’s observations re: central office pressure, saying:

I have a performance appraisal meeting with the regional superintendant, and we go over the school report card. We have to tell how we are addressing goals and identifying the achievement- they are happy now because we made AYP. But if we don’t make it next year, look out. We would have to have monthly meetings with big wigs from downtown, - we have action plans, school improvement plans, etc. “Dorothy Majors” demanded it. If you don’t make it, you have central administration living at your school 24/7.

Suburban principals report a growing central office pressure that had not been present in previous years. Most said the pressure was more informal in nature in that central office is providing them with more student information than in previous years. The expectation is to take this information and use it to design intervention programs that will help the subgroups who are struggling with the PSSA’s core areas, math and reading.

All suburban principals reported that they meet weekly or bi-weekly with either their assistant superintendent or director of secondary education re: the implementation of programs to help their neediest students. All agreed that there was a much higher emphasis on data- driven decision making from the central office and that this was a big factor in the principals feeling increased pressure. Most did say that these meetings are generally positive and were productive in nature, as opposed to the urban principals, whose experiences were much more confrontational in nature. Jackie, Vera and Marty all said that the data meetings in the summer were “very positive and goal oriented” but added that they believed they were good natured only because “they had made AYP the previous year.” If they had not made AYP, all agreed that the meeting would not have been so pleasant and their stress level would have increased exponentially. Pat related that for the first time in her career she had to submit school goals to director of secondary education in her district. Her school had made AYP for 2009, but was on warning in 2008, and had been “called onto the carpet” with central administration, who were asking questions about “what happened to her school”. Before 2008 she reported that there had been very few exchanges about making AYP. So concerned and embarrassed was Pat about being on warning that she crafted a letter to her school family explaining the role of sub-groups in the AYP process. A year later, after meeting AYP requirements, Pat noted that her school district did not acknowledge her or her staff for making it off warning- she describes this frustration as “waiting for a parade that never came”.

Stanley, from Verdant Plains Middle School, had a unique perspective as a school that had already been on corrective action and pulled itself out to achieve proficiency in all of its subgroups. He thought the pressure from central office was a good

thing, and that having central office over at his school was a way to keep all of the lines of communication open and make all of his data transparent. Having already been in Corrective Action I already, the extra scrutiny was something that” he just had to get used to, and accept”. In the end, “the assistant superintendent is involved heavily in a very positive way, and instructional coaches break down the data and then I give it to the staff- this way there is accountability for me and accountability for my teachers”.

I believe that outside forces generated by NCLB affect urban and suburban schools in different ways. The urban principals reported that they felt intense pressure to meet all of the NCLB goals and objectives and had to statistically prove to upper management that they were doing just that. All of the urban schools had met AYP already and are models of proficiency for their district; however, they were still required to attend weekly meetings in order to justify their successful strategies, a classic “ what have you done for me lately” management style that could lead to quick “burn out” for these principals. All reported an exorbitant amount of stress placed on them by outside administration and expected far worse if they did not meet AYP. The suburban principals felt that there was a gradual build-up of pressure over the last 3 years as AYP cut scores increased and their school came close to not making AYP. Still, for 7 of the principals the pressure is mostly positive as has been the discourse between themselves and upper management. Still, the comments of Judy, Sean and Joyce bear watching; all three believe that once they fail to make AYP, the discussion will not be as pleasant or positive. The researcher believes that the “what have you done for me lately” approach from urban central office staff could well be the mantra of suburban administrators in a year or two.

NCLB as the Great Equalizer-An Urban/Suburban Perspective

One of the more compelling themes that arose from this study was the concept of NCLB as a tool for leveling the playing field for all schools, rich or poor, urban or suburban, persistently violent or blue ribbon qualified. This leveling was not quite as apparent when the law was passed in 2002; although all schools needed to achieve AYP for reading and math in Pennsylvania, the achievement cut scores at that time were so low that most suburban schools achieved them rather handedly. These relatively low standards of achievement gave a large number of suburban school districts in the Philadelphia area recognition from PDE in the form of AYP letters of achievement and in some cases, monetary awards. These awards were displayed prominently in several of the school that I visited. These successful suburban schools were also trumpeted in the local newspapers as being “proficient” in all tested areas and therefore superior to the other schools that did not qualify.

During this time, however, many urban schools, specifically in the School District of Philadelphia, failed to qualify and were immediately put on warning, corrective action I and II, with all of the inherent sanctions prescribed by the law (Decker, 2009). In the past year, the sanctions -based portion of NCLB has been used to remove 30 principals from their jobs and has reconstituted whole teaching staffs as part of a reform by Dorothy Majors, Superintendent of Schools for Langham City. Slowly though, the NCLB tide is starting to slowly shift to the Langham suburbs. In the past three years, suburban schools have quietly started to show up either as making AYP by statistical treatments, having been placed on warning for failure to make AYP, and in some instances, placed in corrective action I and II statuses (Carlin, 2010). Where many of the suburban

principals previously thought that their school was one of the top institutions in the Delaware Valley area, they now view their school's progress through the NCLB lens, which is numerically driven and unforgiving from a sub-group perspective. All of the suburban principals interviewed feel that that all schools are under the same pressure to perform and any elitism that may have been present before will be gone by the time 2014 comes around, the year of 100% proficiency for all students.

Robert spoke openly about the stress differences among urban and suburban principals, believing that at this point in time it is basically the same because of NCLB:

There is no difference between suburban and urban principals, nationally, overall the stress is pretty high- we all have pretty difficult decisions to make, and most of them about allocation of resources in order to help our neediest kids. It doesn't matter where you are a leader, it could be Treddyffin-Easttown, Radnor, wherever, the ceiling is closing in on us, we have to close the achievement gap with these sub-groups because it's going to make or break us.

Pat was very candid in her belief that the law had opened up her eyes when thinking about her school and her job security related to specific sanctions.

Yes- NCLB is the great equalizer- we are all in the same boat and it is terrible- we were in warning before and made it out, but it is bad on the other side, completely pressure packed- all of the schools in Pennsylvania are going to be where in a couple years, so we are all going to be together in this. This law is a ridiculous political travesty- all kids cannot be 100% by 2014, urban or suburban. I also don't think bringing in a new principal is not going to help these subgroups learn better.

Jackie chose to speak about the effect that Dr. Majors' "Success 2014" initiative has had on her overall philosophy about NCLB.

I think that Dr. Majors is using the federal law and also PDE to do what she feels is necessary to help the children of Langham City. There used to be no teeth to speak of in the law, well, now there is, and she is exercising it, and good for her. We all, suburban or urban, need to be resourceful, because you can't get blood from a stone- this law has put *all* schools on alert.

Jackie also shared her perspective about the Chester –Upland School District, which was taken over by the state in 2000, as a warning against governmental oversight being the answer for distressed school districts.

Look at Chester Upland, they are a perfect example- they got taken over, had good solid leadership, but got no extra resources- they are still the lowest performing school district in the state for their size- so take-over's and firings might not be the answer in these cases. Resources need to be addressed- this is an unfunded mandate, and it is just a matter of time before we are all on corrective action 2 and everything else.

Marty, a 4th year principal at Bradelstoop Middle School, talked about the law from the perspective that it was unfair to urban and suburban school districts to be compared together with the same criteria mandated by NCLB. His main concern that it was foolish to think that a standard for a high school in a wealthy affluent area would be the same for a completely impoverished school in an urban center 35 miles away.

Well, there have been some schools that have been underperforming for years, and maybe the principals, the pinnacles of the schools, should be removed, but at the same time, you have a high school of 3200 kids and reporting group is 40, how is that fair? The idea that one size fits all, urban or suburban, is wrong- each school has its own challenges and to compare them with one set of rules is unfair.

Marty also addressed how morale in schools is affected by the way NCLB scores and AYP are presented in the media and around his school district. “There is definitely a fear in the schools of not making AYP and it is not healthy- this can come back to bite administrators in the butt if they are not careful”.

From an urban perspective, the principals interviewed felt badly for thier suburban counterparts, who had just begun to feel the pressure of NCLB as opposed to themselves, who had been living with the stress since the laws' beginnings in 2002. Still they could not help but gloat a little about their colleagues' plight. April's perspective was one of affirmation. Instead of her school or district being the one always mentioned

as not having made AYP, the recent suburban struggles were a blessing. “The law has become the great equalizer, because now the suburban schools are feeling the pressure, as opposed to the last 5 years where they would cry the blues about not making 95% proficiency. I have friends who are principals in the suburbs who actually would tell me they are stressed because only 90 % of their subgroups were advanced- I wanted to tell them to shut up! But the law is completely unfair to both suburban and urban schools- and it will eventually have to be changed- if it is not, I guess we are all fired”.

Mack felt that there was a political overtone to the law and would probably face changes if the more wealthy school districts started to show up on AYP sanction lists. He theorized that although the law was meant for everyone, not just urban schools, the law would probably change because of monetary and political influence. “The Republicans in these rich districts will rally against the law because they will not want to be embarrassed by the bad press of not being able to make AYP”. Mack also cited relationships with principals from the suburbs and kiddingly suggested that they finally were beginning to feel his pain, stating, “I got a friend in the suburbs who didn’t make AYP and I laugh at him, because he didn’t make AYP- now he knows how I feel!”

Mack also spoke about Dorothy Majors changes and the fate of the so called “Empowerment Schools” in the district, saying that new evaluation procedures have upped the ante even further to produce proficient students at any cost.

The empowerment schools, the ones that need the most help, have actually been targeted by administration- it’s never happened before- principals were all demoted back to assistant principals or went back to the classroom – it’s unprecedented. The pressure is even higher now that the new school report card, which must be completed by schools by all schools, whether you made it or not. Accountability is huge, because you better make AYP, because if you don’t you are in for it.

The two urban middle school principals agreed that the law had evened the playing field some, but still thought it was unfair to not only themselves but to their suburban colleagues as well.

I believe that this particular continuum is one of the more important indicators of principal stress in schools that met AYP by statistical formulas. All of the principals interviewed (urban or suburban) were well aware of the consequences about not meeting NCLB requirements. All of the suburban principals interviewed thought that the emphasis on PSSA scores and meeting AYP had reached high level status in the past three years and that they were devoting large amounts of time to address academic deficiencies related to subgroups. All agreed that there was a shift in the way NCLB was affecting their suburban schools that previously had not been addressed. Specifically, suburban principals were now feeling stress that urban educators had been feeling since 2002. The urban principals interviewed felt that it was good that other schools understood their situation, but also felt their particular educational circumstances were actually getting more stressful because of added expectations from the district which they operated in.

Perception of Principals About the Future of NCLB

Without exception, all principals interviewed for this study stated that overall they felt the NCLB legislation was a positive step forward for American education and their schools. Indeed, many of the veteran principals (with over ten years experience as an administrator) stated that never in their entire educational careers were they held accountable for all of the students in their school, including subgroups. The idea of accountability for all in their schools was at first a hard sell for principals and teachers

alike, but now with the realization that the law is not going away, educational leaders are now seriously considering ways to bridge the achievement gap. Said Nick, principal of Stanley Middle School,

Accountability is good for schools, and we should keep the law. It's great for subgroups, and therefore it is great for communities and taxpayers, so they can see what kind of product they are getting, standards- based, with a lot of focus.

Jackie commented, "NCLB has raised the awareness that educators need, and it has been sorely lacking- it should not go away and it is good for schools, period".

Overall the principals spoke about the emphasis on subgroup achievement as a positive change for their schools. A major emphasis on differentiated instruction was noted, as were major revisions in curriculum and instruction that has improved student performance. Said Vera, "The law itself has done great things for kids- it's has opened up schools' eyes to focus on curriculum and instruction". April stated that "It is a good law that had the right frame of mind when it was created- helping minorities get the education they deserve". Although the overall reviews about NCLB were positive, it also became apparent that each of the principals had their own "recipe" for correcting what they felt was wrong with the law. All ten principals agreed that there needed to be some kind of change in the way that sub-groups were measured. All principals had commented that there was certain "unfairness" to the law that reflected negatively on their schools.

*Attitudes About NCLB Related to Principal Age,
Work Experience, Education and Gender*

All of the ten interviewees and their schools have been identified as educational institutions that achieved AYP through the use of a statistical treatment (confidence interval or growth model). The ten principals who agreed to participate in the study were cordial and upbeat about giving of their time and all thought that it was a worthwhile endeavor. Not one principal thought that the study would cast a bad reflection on their school or on the profession at large. Six of the principals were in their mid-fifties; two were in their mid-forties and two were in their mid-thirties. Eight of the principals for the purposes of this study were seasoned veterans, having been a principal for at least ten years. One principal had eight years experience and the final participating principal had four years total experience in his building. A comparison of their age and professional experience shows no direct relationship about their perceptions about NCLB and its place in the American educational landscape. All of the ten principals, regardless of age, thought that the NCLB legislation was overall a good law that helped give their schools a more laser-like focus when it came to educating students.

There was no distinct difference between principals who had earned their doctoral degrees vs. principals who had earned masters degrees about their perceptions of NCLB. Although the principals who had earned their doctorates were much more philosophical about NCLB and how it would affect their schools and their personal careers than the masters level leaders, all had the same idea in mind: to modify the law and make it more equitable. All agreed with the overall philosophy of the law because of the way it has brought accountability to the American educational system. They also expressed

disagreement with the way the law is rigidly implemented with zero flexibility in measuring sub-groups. Sally (Doctorate) thought that in the end the government would have no choice but to change the law, because there would not be enough teachers or principals left to replace the ones that were fired under NCLB:

As we get closer to 2014, they will probably create a whole new giant Band-Aid- the government will have to come up with another statistical game in order to justify these kids not making it- PDE bureaucrats do not want the whole state under corrective action II, because it makes them look bad. Radnor will never put up with it!

Jackie (Doctorate) stated that “it’s a good law, it’s a challenge, so let’s try to meet it head –on and be creative about doing it- I’m not going anywhere”. Five principals who had earned their masters degrees in educational leadership agreed that the law was good at face value, but also thought that it needed significant modifications, especially in the areas of sub-group scoring. The five also had raised concern that if the law stayed the way it is, the stress would most likely continue to rise. Nick, (masters) who had been on both sides of the spectrum with his school, spoke about the challenges ahead.

We have been on both sides of the ball, warning, corrective action, and back to proficient- we have lived it- I like to think about the principal position in a positive way, and try to dwell about what’s down the road, but it’s tough, because it’s always there. In the end, I’ve poured my heart and soul into what I am doing, so if it’s not good enough, then I guess it’s not good enough. I love this job, and I do not fear NCLB, let’s challenge it.

Pat (masters) was even more emphatic about where she felt the law needed to change from a punitive model to one that focused on the individual learning style of each student.

The emphasis should be on kids and how they learn individually and focus on specially designed instruction- for the PSSA to ignore these factors is professionally irresponsible- the kids are tested way too much and it puts way too much stress on them.

I believe that the ten participants in this study do not show a positive or negative correlation re: their attitudes about NCLB as dictated by their educational experience. Despite many differing levels, nine principals agree that the law is good for the country, and should be reauthorized, with some revisions to account for subgroups.

Nor was age or professional experience a distinguishing factor among the principals in terms of how they thought the NCLB law should be modified. All of the principals (minus one, who believed the law should be completely repealed) thought the law should be reauthorized, but with significant changes in the way sub-groups are measured in their respective schools. The principal who voted for repealing the law would be classified in her mid 40's, and had begrudgingly admitted earlier that the law overall was a good one and helped the kids at her school. Age and professional experience were also not an issue when discussing the changes that had occurred in their schools over the last five years; all principals stated that their schools had changed dramatically in ways big and small. Curriculum/Instruction, professional development, intensive groupings, focus on sub-groups, non-stop assessment, literacy, inclusion models and professional learning communities are just a small taste of this fundamental shift in how they are reaching children at their respective schools. These shifts not only occur in the way that teachers deliver instruction, but in the way that these principals design their master schedules to accommodate all of the different learners in their schools. All principals, regardless of age or experience said that they have had to drastically change their thinking when it came to designing schedules for their schools. All ten principals mentioned at least one intervention that had not been in their master

schedules from previous years. Nine out of ten principals stated that they had received some form of “pushback” by staff when introducing these new changes.

Eight out of the ten principals interviewed thought that their jobs had changed dramatically in that they had previously viewed themselves as managers in their buildings but came to describe themselves over the last 5 years as “instructional leaders”. These eight principals who described this change in their own self-perception were in their mid-forties and mid –fifties. The other two principals made statements that they had always thought of themselves as instructional leaders from the time that they secured their positions. Both of those principals were in their mid thirties and had less than 10 years experience in the job.

All principals regardless of age and experience except one said that they would gladly recommend the educational leadership profession to other colleagues, with eight describing concrete examples of mentorship programs that were presently being implemented in their buildings. All principals except one expressed disdain for the idea that they would not encourage others to participate in an educational leadership program because of the negativity surrounding NCLB. All described an attitude of perseverance and thankfulness that they were in their present positions, regardless of the stress that they face on a day-to day basis. This surprised me as I thought that the younger principals who were not as close to retirement as the older leaders would feel more stress and worry about their jobs from an NCLB perspective. This does not appear to be the case, as shown by the remarks of Marty, a third year principal in his mid-thirties that mirrors Mack, a 35 year vet who is in his Mid-50’s and stated that he is ready to retire soon:

Marty: I don't want to leave the profession, some days, I think I might want to be a consultant, but really working with the kids, seeing them do well and improve, I love education and I wouldn't leave at this point, no matter how bad the pressure got, and I would never leave because of NCLB.

Mack: I can't leave now, I've got too much to do here at this school, too many kids to teach, too many teachers to support- the pressure is immense, but at the end of the day you just hope and pray that you have done enough. I know NCLB is always out there, but I don't let it rule my life, and I would hope it wouldn't rule anyone else's.

There does not appear to be any consistent pattern for determining the amount of pressure that each principal feels from the changes brought about by the NCLB legislation. Out of the ten principals, their responses derived from question 6 (would you stay in the job as it currently exists), three principals, all veterans, two in their mid-fifties and one in the mid forties described feeling intense job pressure and would not mind if they left the profession entirely for a new career. These three principals also mentioned specific career paths during the interview that they have considered at one time or another over the past five years, suggesting that they had put some considerable thought into leaving the educational profession.

Sally offered:

I would definitely like to do something different down the road, open up a business, something creative, maybe even a librarian in a public school- the pressure is too much at the top, it's not fun anymore.

Pat surmised:

I thought about getting out of this business on several occasions, maybe just moving my family away and starting a new career- that's the shame of it- I have all of this education, double masters, and I wind up with all the fingers pointed at me- this job is affecting my health.

Linda said:

I've been in this business much too long, and I've seen a lot of changes come and go, and I will be getting out soon enough- retiring- to try something else. But the pressure is too much, it is crushing to good people who help kids and then are told that it is not good enough.

The fact that three principals, all female, stated that they had at some point in time considered leaving the profession is an issue that is discrepant from their previous answers to other questions related to NCLB. Although they all made it explicitly clear that NCLB stress had not caused them to think of changing careers (they said the overall job stress was the cause), it is difficult to separate the two contexts. One could argue that NCLB stress begets overall principal stress, as they are inextricably linked together by the myriad responsibilities that fall to these principals each school day. The honesty and candor of the principals are juxtaposed against their overall favoritism for the law and how it has increased learning outcomes for their neediest students is something that needs to be recognized. The one female principal in her forties is truly an outlier of the study. Her comments about the law needing to be repealed were dramatic when compared with the other principals' statements about keeping the law and adjusting it accordingly. She also talked about moving away with her family out of state to work for a major family entertainment company, which was not a typical response to that question among the principals, and I was not sure if she was being facetious or not. Perhaps having felt the stress of being on corrective action once and pulling the school back to proficiency has given her first hand knowledge about how difficult it really was to achieve that goal. Looking ahead at 2014, that reality of not being able to make AYP no matter how hard you work seems to have been on her mind during the interview. With 20 more years to work and retirement nowhere in sight, changing careers may seem sometimes

(especially on bad days) like a good choice to young principals, this researcher included. The other two principals who talked about changing careers are conversely on the other side of the fence, closer to retirement and more secure in their career decision making processes. Both of these administrators had grown children who were married or working on their own; the younger principal had small children and major financial obligations to meet. These factors may be relevant in their overall attitude re: work satisfaction and retention as principals.

At the same time, seven principals of varying age and professional experience made statements suggesting that although the pressure of NCLB is strong, they would not leave their jobs because of it. Three of the principals who were veterans and in their 50's described a feeling that they would not be surprised if the "pendulum would be swinging back pretty soon" toward a more reasonable alternative as opposed to the punitive NCLB regulations. Said Robert:

I would not let NCLB and all of its stress color the way I look at my profession. The pressure is on, but I feel this might be swinging back to a less pressurized system- a middle ground where things are reasonable again.

Larry proffered:

This law has bolstered the competency of the educators delivering the programs- more certifications, more highly qualified teachers- it also has raised the bar for us, which is great-this means more children get what they need. The pressure is on to make the sub-group scores, but I think that will change down the road- let's keep the law, and align it better with the special education laws, and we'll be alright.

Gender was not the positive predictor of principal stress that I thought it would be before I started this study. Indeed, the comments of the principals regarding their stress because of NCLB were incredibly similar, with little overall difference between the male

and female principals. All said that they felt pressure to perform; all admitted that their schools had changed in dramatic ways since the advent of NCLB; and all had talked positively overall about the law and how change was needed in America's educational system. All of the principals (except one) regardless of gender described an educational system in which pressure from central administration had increased over the last five years. All except one felt that the central administration attention was slightly unnerving, but also expressed the positive commonality that having open lines of dialogue with central administration was better than any "surprises" down the road. Five men and four women also stated that despite all of the hardships involved in complying with the law, they would never quit and, even more dramatically, declared that it would not rule their lives or cause them to work in fear of losing their jobs.

Three of the five female principals interviewed did express out and out frustration with the law, with specific comments directed at the Pennsylvania legislature; these political comments were generally not heard from the male principals, who spoke more about the actual interventions going on in their school. This is not to say that the female principals did not focus on interventions for their students; all of the interviewees were passionate about what they were doing in their schools to help kids. Gender also did not appear to be factor in how principals prepared their staff for NCLB regulations; all of them made sure that a variety of programs were set up so their faculty knew exactly where their school stood as far as making AYP. All of the principals, regardless of gender, showed a remarkable ability to design intricate master schedules, spearhead complex initiatives, and placate reluctant staff to take part in the reforming of their schools.

All of the principals' regardless of gender spoke highly of their teaching staffs and gave them verbal praise for their resilience since the advent of NCLB. The principals emphasized that although they had taken several steps to educate their faculty about the NCLB legislation and their own school's AYP status, it was done in a positive way. Not one principal stated that they emphasized the fact that their school had achieved AYP because of a confidence interval. Several commented that focusing on the positive is the common sense thing to do, as they are not in warning or corrective action at the moment.

Seven principals, four women and three men, stated they felt that AYP awareness among their teaching staff was "high" at their buildings. They reported that most of the dissemination of information about AYP status was done in the beginning of the year at faculty or data retreat meetings. Said Sally: "The PSSA data is all spelled out, the faculty know where we are for AYP, and administrative presence is in the classrooms throughout the year. We don't emphasize the punitive measures of NCLB, but we do emphasize interventions". Sally felt that there really was no reason at this point to scare the staff with rhetoric and threats. They were doing the best they could, the scores were high, and she felt that most of them were truly wonderful, dedicated educators. Two others, one man and one woman, stated that there was a 'moderate' degree of awareness about their AYP status. These principals reported the same type of information delivery systems as the "high level awareness" principals. Marty conceded that he just wanted to get through the data portion of his opening day presentation so he could talk about the overall positive progress that his school had made in the past year. "There really isn't any reason to pull the plug on the whole school because our sub-groups are struggling- we give the data at the beginning of the year, let the faculty know that they made it, and

emphasize that as a victory. The attitude is that we made it, and that is what counts”.

Marty was obviously proud of his staff and wanted to emphasize the positive instead of any negative feedback. Larry, who did not mention NCLB to his staff at all and spoke briefly about the school’s AYP status, had a lot of confidence that his school and teachers. He felt they were doing the right things, and did not feel the need to talk about PSSA or the AYP status of his school.

There is very little mention of AYP to the staff, because overall we are looking at 93 % proficient overall. We are doing a ton of interventions, but inclusion and inquiry based learning have always been part of our school- we don’t need to focus on any negatives.

Before I attempted this study, I had made the assumption that gender would play a large role in determining the stress level of principals who have undergone changes at their school related to NCLB. It now appears that gender, at least for this study, played a very small role in determining stress levels of these educational professionals. All of the male and female participants with one exception thought the law overall was a good one, and that they were determined to fight for their jobs as opposed to being fearful about losing them. All had felt the relatively the same amount of stress because of the law and were adding interventions on a daily basis. All expressed a confidence in the American educational system and three male/female principals expressed the thought that there would be a positive swing back in the direction of a more “reasonable model”.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS

This study attempted to ascertain the level of stress felt by middle school administrators in the five county Philadelphia area since the passage of the NCLB legislation in 2002. Specifically, I wanted to know how the NCLB mandate was impacting middle schools that had achieved AYP but only by the statistical treatment known as a confidence interval. The use of the confidence interval in determining AYP for this study were related to one or more the schools' subgroups, i.e. special education, English language learners, economically disadvantaged students, etc. Research in this study also attempted to find how these schools had changed academically, socially and politically since the advent of the law in 2002. Finally, the perceptions of principals and their commitment to staying in the profession were examined.

Research Questions

The two main research questions posed by this study follow:

1. How do principals describe their stress when their schools achieve Adequate Yearly Progress as result of a positive confidence interval score or Pennsylvania Performance Index with one of their sub-groups, i.e., special education, English language learners, minority populations, and economically disadvantaged students?

2. What kind of strategies are these principals using in order to effectively cope with the perceived stress of NCLB mandates and how has this impacted their job satisfaction/ job retention perspective on their careers in the field of education?

Internal Stress in School

Middle level principals in this study describe their stress as not so much being AYP – ‘centric’ as much as overall stress spread over several educational areas/concerns in their school. This attitude was more prevalent in the suburban schools. Urban principals described a more focused drive toward AYP and therefore passing on that message to their respective staffs in a more pronounced fashion. With that being said, the participants of this study all perceived that there were more demands placed on themselves and their schools since the passage of the NCLB legislation in 2002. These demands, whether political or administrative in nature, contributed to an overall feeling of stress among the participants. All of the participants stated that although they do not let AYP rule their lives, they are acutely aware of it’s presence around every corner, and prepare for it as much as they possibly can through the use of interventions at their schools. This stress was described in different ways depending on the individual principal being interviewed. Despite variation, all agreed that organizational structure changes in their schools as a result of the NCLB mandate have resulted in increased pressures on their staff and themselves.

Principals cited structural shifts in the way that master schedules are designed, focusing on getting sub group populations in a position to learn concepts for which they will be responsible when they take the PSSA each school year. Special education certification issues pertaining to what teacher is “highly qualified’ have resulted in a team

teaching model that requires support by professional development, which the principals report difficulty in securing. These “forced” team teaching situations have brought stress to the participants who were used to being in charge of their own class rooms. That stress is then “given” to the principals in the form of “push back” and internal grumbling.

All of the principals described in great detail their school’s focus on sub-groups and all of the interventions that are in place in order to help them learn. Keeping track of their progress has added another layer of responsibility for the principals; several principals with more than ten years experience at their schools said that there was little focus on these subgroups before the NCLB mandate of 2010. The law and its’ “teeth” have forced their schools to recognize these different learners, and that recognition has brought change, and with change, new stress. All of the principals described their schools as being at least moderately aware of the AYP expectation, and information is shared with the staff at the beginning of the year regarding goals and objectives tied into AYP.

External Stress

The increased external stress levels that middle school principals have felt since the advent of NCLB was affirmed by all of the participants in this study. They all said that they had more direct contact with central office employees now (assistant superintendants, director of curriculum) than they did pre-NCLB. These meetings now focused on direct interventions related to students who did not meet AYP requirements for the previous year, or “bubble” students who were close to not making AYP according to school assessments. Suburban principals commented that the meetings were professional and cordial but added that they believed if they did not make AYP the following year, the cordiality would be replaced with a more hard-line attitude. Three

suburban principals described it as “what have you done for me lately” attitude, something they had not felt in the pre-NCLB era. There was also an understanding that they could technically be rated unsatisfactory if their PSSA scores were non-proficient, which could affect their job security within their district. One suburban principal whose school had been on school improvement I stated that he thought the pressure turned out to be positive for him and his teachers, because it motivated him to set goals and stick to them. Urban principals described a more intense external presence in their buildings from central office administration. Informal meetings have been replaced by weekly or biweekly sessions and a major focus in the use of weekly assessments has occurred in order to identify students who are not progressing. Some of the adjectives used to describe these meetings include “pressure packed”, “anxiety laced” and a “write them up” mentality, meaning the principals were encouraged by their regional superintendants to give unsatisfactory ratings to teachers who had too many students in their particular classrooms not meeting benchmark proficiency* (the main assessment protocol for this particular district). One urban principal interviewed said that she could not morally give an unsatisfactory rating to an otherwise dedicated teaching professional just because of benchmark scores, which caused her great anxiety and worry. Interestingly, the worry was not for personal, but for the teacher being targeted- the principal feared that this teacher would be “scapegoated” which she thought was completely unfair.

The specter of outside government interference, both local and national, was a topic that all ten of the principals spoke about with passion. Even though most agreed that NCLB was a good law overall, they also thought that federal and state legislatures had overstepped their bounds when designing these mandates. The major concern was that

there has been little or no consultation on the federal or state governments' part to include their voice in the legislative process. The result has been a law that uses a single method evaluation system that focuses on "do or die" method of measurement instead of a variety of evaluative methods, i.e., and growth models. Still, the principals' attitude re: government interference is one of indifference, as most think the law will have to change by 2014 or "they will have to empty out all the schools of principals and teachers on a national level".

Instructional Changes in Schools Mandated by Principals in Response to NCLB

The relationship between new instructional changes at the middle school level and NCLB mandates was described throughout by this study. All ten principal participants said that there have been several instructional/interventional changes at their school since the beginning of the NCLB mandate in 2002. These interventions, if not present in their buildings before, were used to supplement regular instruction and were never permanent in any sense of the word. Now, post NCLB, these interventions drive the instruction at a number of these schools. A majority of these interventions have focused on helping students scoring basic or below basic in reading and math improve their skills. The hope is that these students would improve enough in order to pass the PSSA at the end of the year, although all of the principals, when asked to clarify, emphasized that they were looking for year –to year growth as a true indicator of progress. Other technological interventions, such as individualized tracking of student progress through software programs, point to a different, precision- based level of intervention that was not present pre- NCLB. Benchmark testing, mainstreaming, differentiated instruction, professional

learning communities, cross curricular approaches, and intervention grouping were common strategies employed by the principals in order to effect growth in their students. When asked how they would describe their jobs, all ten principals responded that they either always thought they were instructional leaders or had become instructional leaders since the advent of NCLB. The principals who didn't initially describe themselves as instructional leaders thought they were "managers" of their buildings pre- NCLB. The employment of these educational strategies does not infer that they are coping mechanisms used by principals to defray stress related to the NCLB statute, but are purely intervention based. On the contrary, 90% of the principals interviewed said that the implementation of these programs contributes to the stress of their staff and themselves. Additionally, all of the principals, although they were never asked directly, incorporated their family support system into their interview answers. All of the principals mentioned at least one family reference in relation to coping with pressures of leading their buildings. I believe that there is some type of stress/family connection that allows these administrators to prioritize what is important to them and this family connection serves as a positive conduit for releasing stress. No one exemplified this philosophy more than Pat, who said:

I love my family, they are my rock. I have two beautiful children and a loving husband who supports me, I want to be around for them so we can enjoy our lives together. Without their support, it would be tough to get up each day and do this job. Sometimes I dream about just packing up and getting a job where there isn't as much stress. But at the same time I love what I do, it's who I am so it's tough.

Principal Job Satisfaction and Retention Related to NCLB Stress

Low job satisfaction related to NCLB by middle level principals was not borne out by this study. Seven out of ten principals stated that they enjoyed their choice of careers, loved their jobs and would not leave the profession, regardless of the stress. All of the principals interviewed for this study stated that overall they felt the NCLB legislation was a positive step forward for American education and their individual schools. All agreed that it was the first time some kind of quantifiable accountability paradigm was applied to our American educational system, and thought it was a good idea. All of the principals had unique ideas about how to positively use the NCLB statute in their schools, and all agreed (except one) that the law should stay but be changed specifically in the way sub-groups are measured if it is to be used in the future.

Seven principals said that they would stay in the position and have not considered changing to a different career, no matter how difficult the job gets in the future. Three veteran principals thought that the “accountability pendulum” would be swinging back in the next few years to a more reasonable middle ground, and saw no reason to leave the job. After all, they had seen several school reform efforts come and go during their long careers in education. Nine out of ten principals stated that despite all of the hardships involved with complying with the law, they would never quit, and from a social/emotional perspective, *declared that it would not rule their lives or cause them to fear that they might lose their jobs for not meeting the NCLB mandate.* All of the principals interviewed said that “the students” were the main reason that they stayed in their positions of educational leadership and felt the drive to help each of their kids learn and grow into successful adults. These attitudes, while very positive, give rise to one

of the limitations of this study, that being the concept of “heroic leadership”. These answers were given in a one hour interview, and the principals knew the topic of the study in advance. It is feasible to think that maybe some principals tailored their responses to my questions to what they thought I might want to hear. This “verisimilitude”, the quality or appearance of truth, is something that principals and guidance counselors see everyday in the schools where they work, whether it’s a disgruntled parent, a nervous first year teacher, or a hysterical teenager. The act of figuring out what is real and what isn’t is something that comes with time and experience. It is also known that “soldiering on” is a well known and well used response form leaders under stress; so it could raise credibility issues in some quarters. As a professional immersed in the field of education every day, who has counseled many students, parents and teachers, I personally believe that the principals were being forthright in their responses. On that day, at that time, in that place, they gave me their honest responses.

Maxwell stated:

“The selection of times, settings and individuals that can provide you with the information you need in order to answer your research questions is the most important consideration in qualitative selection decisions”. (p. 88)

As the researcher for this study, I feel very confident that this dissertation was able to shine a light on principal stress brought about by the NCLB statute in an accurate and honest fashion. All of the principals talked openly about how the law has dramatically changed how they operate their schools, and the increased stress that accompanies these changes. The responses of the interviewees were honest and I applaud them for being so open about a very sensitive subject. I have no doubt that the main goals of this study were satisfied by the data gleaned from the interviews.

It should be noted that out of the three principals who had made comments that were reflective of leaving the profession and starting a new career, two of them were close to retirement age and augmented their comments by saying they would retire and then start something else outside of the education world. The remaining principal is in the middle of her career.

Three principals interviewed who had been in the educational field and left to pursue business interests eventually found their way back to the school environment. All stated that although they had good experiences outside the realm of education, they did not get the same sense of fulfillment as they did when they were helping kids. All stated that they were back to stay and would not leave their jobs until they retired or were asked to leave.

As we approach the year 2014, it may be a good idea to explore the concept of principal stress related to NCLB in a more systemic, linear fashion. As the AYP expectations continue to grow higher, and school sanctions become more common across the nation, the idea of principal burnout connected to NCLB could become an increasingly relevant educational topic. According to Salazar (2006), principals have begun reporting higher stress levels as they try to implement their specific NCLB initiatives. There is also some research that suggests that NCLB has dampened their enthusiasm for their respective school districts.

Regardless of the current research as compared to this particular study (which seems to refute the above study), principals will continue to implement more and more initiatives in their schools in order to bring their students up to the AYP proficiency level. The positive part of this equation is that more children will be given the resources and

interventions they need in order to succeed; the question is whether the principal can keep up with changes and pressures that the job seems to create on a daily basis.

Punctuated Equilibrium

NCLB's place in American educational history can be seen through the lens of the decision making theory known as punctuated equilibrium. The punctuated equilibrium theory of Niles Eldridge and Stephen J. Gould was proposed as a criticism of traditional Darwinian Theory of evolution. Gould postulated that that history operates in a series of "fits and starts", sometimes moving very fast, sometimes very slowly or not at all. From Gould's perspective , political conflict drives punctuated equilibrium; ideas move in and out of policy agendas over time, and then speed up to induce rapid change. Invariably, it calms down and stabilizes itself.

The concept of punctuated equilibrium as related to NCLB has several useful applications. The law, after several years of infighting and bickering among Congressional lawmakers, finally passed in 2002 and was a bipartisan effort. (Debray, 2005). It was a groundbreaking law in that it was the first statute of its kind to apply true accountability standards to school districts. In the past eight years, school districts across the country have tried to keep up with its ambitious standards and expectations. From a national perspective NCLB could be described as the largest, most cohesive extended shift in the history of American education. Never have our schools, principals and teachers been told that they would be reconstituted (or fired) if their students did not meet annual yearly progress. This giant "fit and start" was evident in all of the schools I visited. Revamped curricula, multiple interventions, teacher training, differentiated

instruction; multiple assessments and the use of data to drive instruction are all just some of the new initiatives that were spurred by the NCLB statute.

Nowhere was rapid change more evident than in the way special education students are now being instructed. Although there have been educational movements in the past twenty- five years to include special education students in the regular curriculum, there was no real motivation or consequence to keep school districts honest about their efforts with this student population. Now, as a protected sub-group that counts in each school's AYP calculation, there has been a dramatic shift in the way these students are instructed. All of the participants interviewed said that their special education population was completely embedded into the regular education population, learning the exact same curriculum. Most of the special education teachers on their staffs are now co-teaching in some kind of capacity, with differentiated instruction now a major professional development priority.

This new dynamic has changed the way the participants view themselves and their schools. Some had thought they were managers of schools pre-NCLB; now they proudly describe themselves as instructional leaders. During this time, the participants describe their teaching staffs as slowly but surely changing from isolated teachers in their own rooms to collaborating professionals concerned with the school as a whole. Principals attribute these wide shifts in large part to the NCLB laws forcing them to think and be creative leaders outside the box.

The paradox of Punctuated Equilibrium relating to NCLB applies to the expectation of stability that occurs after the initial "fit and start". This law, starting in 2002 and gaining momentum on a yearly basis, caused a seismic shift in how schools

were going to deliver their product. The shift, however, has been continuous, with zero stabilization in the American educational system. On the contrary, the pressure on school districts and their principals continues to grow as we approach 2014 and the year of mandated one-hundred percent proficiency. Still, with the exception of one principal, all had said that they would not buckle under the enormous pressures of future NCLB sanctions and would never quit their jobs or stop helping kids learn. It should be noted that in February 2010 the Obama Administration (United States Department of Education, 2010) released details of its' new educational agenda which included the revamping of the measurement systems used to judge schools, including AYP. These fundamental changes are sure to draw passionate responses from multiple stakeholders, and bears close scrutiny as 2010 is an election year for Congress. This effort by Obama may be the stability that Eldridge & Gould spoke of, or it could be the start of even more dramatic change for American schools.

Role Conflict and Stress in Principals

The demand-control-social support theory (Rodriguez et al; 2001) along with the role conflict/role ambiguity theory posited by Rogers (1976) seem to moderately support the idea of increased stress among the participants of the study as a result of the NCLB statute. Role conflict and role ambiguity were described by Rogers as negative stress occurring when job expectations held by those in a position of authority clash with those in a subservient role. Yes, principals did cite that they felt more pressure in their jobs as a result of NCLB. However, the principals cited examples where they had positive interactions with their staffs and were more cognizant of being proactive with them as opposed to pre-NCLB. All of the principals interviewed cited that they were in constant

communication with their staffs about school expectations and thought that their staffs perceived them as working just as hard as they were in the classroom. The stress and consequences are eventually the same for both teacher and principal if they do not meet AYP – reconstitution and dismissal from their schools. This would seem to keep the stress level at equal levels and several principals said they hardly bring up NCLB sanctions during the year at all because of the negativity it might engender among the staff. Again, the principals at the beginning of each school day focused their energies are helping their staff work with kids, and not on negative associations or doomsday scenarios.

Demand-control social-support theory posits that negative stress occurs when an individual is in a job characterized by high demand, low control and low support. Although the participants agreed that there was a lot of rigidity in the law (low control) and their job was to make all children learn at the proficient level (high demand), 90% still wanted to stay in the position and looked at the law as a challenge to be met. The principals also said that although there was more oversight from the central office (low support), they cited several examples where their superiors were positive and supportive of their efforts. It would appear that regardless of the lack of external control (federal and state mandates), the principals in this study were able to keep their staffs together, reach a consensus among all stakeholders (teachers, parents, students) and still feel positive about their own jobs. All of the principals praised their staffs and described them as being a “team” or a “family”. When originally choosing this theoretical perspective, the researcher expected the model to expose the myriad of negative stress being felt by principals as a result of NCLB; instead, the opposite was true. At least in the

schools interviewed for this study, principals have found strategies and used their leadership skills to bring their staffs together, instead of letting the fear of NCLB consequences tear it apart.

NCLB as the Great Equalizer- A New Reality

My final conclusion can be found in the way the NCLB statute has started to level the playing field between suburban and urban school districts. Suburban principals in the study cited increased pressure since 2002, especially over the last three years as cut scores have increased dramatically across the board. It is no longer a “city” problem that only affects poor districts; AYP does not discriminate according to race or any other demographic group. All sub-groups must be proficient in PSSA; if they are not the school will suffer the consequences. The embarrassment and shock of being placed on the warning list along with schools that were long assumed inferior has not been lost on some of the suburban principals interviewed for this study. Still, however initially negative it was to be on warning or corrective action status, all of these principals spoke enthusiastically about the efforts of their teachers and students focused on turning their scores around. The NCLB mandate has forced urban and suburban schools alike to communicate and work with each other in order to achieve their common goal- proficiency for all students by 2014.

The Qualitative Approach

The qualitative approach to this study allowed me to interview principals who were tied together by a common overall theme- helping kids learn while achieving AYP at the same time, no matter how daunting the circumstances. The qualitative case study method allowed detailed, first person account data to arise that may not have been

possible in a quantitative study. It is my hope that future qualitative research can address in a more in –depth fashion any questions that may have not been answered in my study, specifically: (1). The role of the Punctuated Equilibrium model in relation to NCLB – when and if the “fit and start” will ever stabilize; (2) the use of schools/principals who are persistently failing to meet AYP requirements; (3) the impact of principal personality traits in relation to NCLB will be explored in the future.

I believe that this study has made contributions to the literature in three areas. The first is middle school principal attitudes/ beliefs toward NCLB when their school has achieved AYP by the use of a confidence interval. The second contribution to the literature is the emergence of a theoretical construct that redefines NCLB as a powerful tool that has evened the playing field for urban/suburban school districts. The third area is the principals’ myriad successful school- based interventions that help kids learn- these interventions directly contribute to the NCLB instructional practices literature.

Recommendations for Future Research

Recommendations for future research regarding examination of principal stress as a result of NCLB are as follows: (1) the use of schools who have not made AYP over a specific period of time, i.e. schools in corrective action; (2) the exploration of specific personality traits that are common among successful principals; (3) further study of the NCLB “equality” phenomena that was identified in this study among urban/suburban school districts; (4) investigation of the effectiveness of NCLB- inspired academic interventions on schools over time.

I believe that the concept of principal stress should be explored further, specifically in schools that have been in corrective action for several years. These

principals, who may be brand new to their buildings or be 30 year veterans, would most likely have a great deal to offer about their coping mechanisms when confronted by NCLB challenges. They may also have been using multiple intervention designs over a longer period of time. Concentrating on which interventions worked and which didn't may yield new data that will help schools (urban or suburban) that find themselves in corrective action I and II. Understanding how these principals work with their staff when confronted by high pressure external forces may also yield productive data. This study could be done qualitatively or in a quantitative fashion.

I would also recommend that future study be pointed toward the exploration of personality characteristics among principals. The principals in this study all displayed a number of the same positive personality characteristics. All of the principals were tough, motivated, resilient and dedicated to their jobs and families. They were creative, open thinkers, and flexible in their design approaches to their buildings. All of them had reached out to their respective staffs and shared NCLB/PSSA data, thereby building rapport in their buildings. All of their schools had achieved AYP for consecutive years and all thought of themselves as instructional leaders. It could be hypothesized that positive personality traits were reflected in their school's AYP success. A further examination of principals who have made AYP (or have not) and how their personality traits affect their schools may yield pertinent information about what it takes to be a successful educational leader.

As the nation moves further toward one hundred percent proficiency by 2014, I believe more data should be collected about the AYP equality gap that is shrinking between urban and suburban school districts. In the next two years, cut scores will be

moving up toward seventy and eighty percent for reading and math. More suburban school districts that are struggling to break even with PSSA in 2010 will most assuredly find themselves on the wrong side of AYP calculations as the expectations rise higher and higher. My interest would lie in how these suburban districts communicate their needs and if they would be inclined to reach out to their successful urban schools for advice/expertise about coping with NCLB sanctions.

I would also recommend that the studies in the above areas be completed in a qualitative manner. The qualitative nature of this particular study allowed me to get up close and collect data in a highly descriptive way that would have been very difficult if a quantitative tool was used. I believe the qualitative study would allow the researcher to understand the unique contexts that principals find themselves in the age of accountability, and how those contexts affect their own decisions regarding their schools.

In a qualitative study,

The researcher is not only interested in the physical events and behavior taking place, but also in how the participants in the study make sense of these, and how their understanding influences their behavior” (Maxwell, 2005).

My final recommendation in regard to future research is that the impact of the NCLB- inspired interventions among schools be investigated. It became apparent in the interviews that a myriad of interventions have been implemented in the interviewees’ schools as they try to keep up with AYP expectations. These interventions, ranging from simple (tutoring) to very difficult (master scheduling driven by sub-group inclusion practices) would need to be analyzed to see whether they have made a positive or negative difference in the way students learn. All of the principals cited the need for definitive data about interventions that they would then use to drive instructional practice

in their schools. With the emergent use of assessment data by principals and teachers, the natural progression would be to use data to see if a program or initiative is effective.

Interventions that have proven to be successful in helping students achieve their goals could then be shared with other schools, i.e., an AYP best practices curriculum. This type of study might benefit from a quantitative approach, as large amounts of data would need to be collected from a wide participant group. Data in this study would need to be analyzed as quickly as possible and then delivered back to the school systems for use in the further development of instructional intervention systems.

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APPENDIX A**GENERAL CONSENT FORM****Consent Form to Participate in Research**

Title: A Qualitative Study of the Perceived Stress Levels of Middle School Principals in the No Child Left Behind Era.

Investigators:

Principal Investigator, Corrinne Caldwell, PhD, Department Chair, Educational Leadership (215) 204- 6174

Student Investigator, Mr. William Carlin, Doctoral Student, Educational Leadership Program (215) 412-9662

Purpose of Research

We are currently engaged in a study that is looking at the perceived stress levels that middle school principals are feeling in relation to the federal No Child Left Behind Statutes. To be eligible for the study your school had to be successful in meeting AYP requirements and also used a confidence interval for defining AYP success with at least one sub-group. To help us gain further insights into this area of research we would like to ask you to participate in this study by taking part in a short 30- 45 minute interview. This interview will be at your convenience and should not impact your day to day professional responsibilities at your school.

General Research Design:

The research that is proposed will be done in an interview format and will be audio taped for transcription purposes at a later date. The researcher will ask between 10-12 questions re: principal perceptions of stress related to NCLB and how it has effected the overall instructional environment of the school. The researcher will come to the school of the subject or another agreed upon location by both participants. The interview will be the only time commitment expected of the subjects in this study.

Benefits of this Study

The main benefit of this study is that it will shed light on the amount of perceived stress that middle school principals are facing each day as a result of the NCLB statutes. It is generalizable as research data because this information can be used to fully inform principal training programs about the need to address NCLB related issues in school management. The lack of NCLB stress-related studies makes it a relevant topic to discuss, given the fact the law will most likely be re-authorized with little change toward inclusion of sub-groups an AYP indicator.

Title: A Qualitative Study of the Perceived Stress Levels of Principals in the No Child Left Behind Era.

Confidentiality

The data that you provide will be recorded anonymously, so your participation and anything you say during the session will be held in the strictest confidence. A numbered coding system will be implemented with each participant to ensure confidentiality. The number correlating to each research subject will only be known to the researcher and no one else. We welcome questions about this study at any time. Your participation in this study is on a voluntary basis, and you may refuse to participate at any time without consequence or prejudice.

Research Rights

Questions about your rights as a research subject may be directed to Mr. Richard Throm, Office of the Vice President for research, Institutional Review Board, Temple University, 3400 N. Broad Street, Philadelphia PA 19140, (215) 707-8757.

Signing your name below indicates that you have read and understand the contents of this Consent Form and that you agree to take part in this study.

Participant's Signature

Date

Investigator's Signature

Date

APPENDIX B**SUPERINTENDENT'S PERMISSION TO STUDY**

Dear School Superintendent,

My name is William Carlin and I am an assistant principal at Pennfield Middle School in the North Penn School District, which is located in Lansdale Pennsylvania. I am also a 6th year doctoral student in the Educational Leadership program at Temple University. I am currently beginning my dissertation research in the Fall of 2009. My dissertation is entitled "A Qualitative Study of the Perceived Stress Levels of Middle School Principals in the No Child Left Behind Era". My main objective is to get feedback from middle school principals in the Delaware Valley area about how NCLB has changed the way they work in their schools, and how they personally feel about the law and its future.

The topic is extremely important to me as an educational leader. Although there are many studies about principal stress, there are few that have addressed the No Child Left Behind statute since it's inception in 2002. Over the last five years I have seen my school change in many different ways because of the law, some good, and some challenging. My interest lies in how other middle school leaders in the area have addressed the demands of NCLB.

I would like to know if your school district would be interested in participating with this study. It is qualitative in nature, and will require an audio taped interview with one middle school principal that will last between 45 minutes to one hour. The interview is the only requirement if your district chooses to participate in the study. Confidentiality will be assured through the use of pseudonyms and coded number system so the educational leader's identity will be protected.

Please let me know if your school district would be interested in this study. I believe that my topic is highly relevant and will illuminate how we as principals are handling this new era of educational accountability. If you have any questions or feedback re: this study I can be reached at bcarlin@temple.edu or by cell phone- 267-644-5541. I welcome any and all input. Thank you for your time!

Sincerely,

William Carlin
Doctoral Candidate- Educational Leadership Program
Temple University

_____ Yes, I give permission for educational leaders (Middle School Principal) in my school district to participate in an interview session with William Carlin as part of his dissertation for Temple University.

_____ No, I do not give my permission to allow educational leaders (Middle School Principal) in my school district to participate in an interview session with William Carlin as part of his dissertation for Temple University.

Signature of Person Approving Request

Title of Person Approving Request

APPENDIX C

PERMISSION TO AUDIOTAPE

Permission to Audiotape

Principal Investigator's Name: Corrinne Caldwell

Student Investigator's Name: William Carlin

Department: Temple University, Educational Leadership Program

Project Title: **A Qualitative Study of the Perceived Stress Levels of Middle School Principals in the No Child Left Behind Era.**

Subject: _____ Date _____

Log # _____

I give _____ permission to audiotape me. This audiotape will only be used for the following purposes:

____ RESEARCH

This Audiotape will be used as part of a research project at _____. I have already given written consent for my participation in this research project. At no time will my name be used.

WHEN WILL I BE AUDIOTAPED?

I agree to be audio taped during the time period: September 2009 to November 2009

HOW LONG WILL THESE TAPES BE USED?

I give my permission for these tapes to be used from:

Title of Study: **A Qualitative Study of the Perceived Stress Levels of Middle School Principals in the No Child Left Behind Era**

September 2009 to November 2009

(Data will be stored for 3 years after completion of this study.)

WHAT IF I CHANGE MY MIND?

I understand that I can withdraw my permission at any time. Upon my request, the audiotapes (s) will no longer be used. This will not affect my care or relationship with _____ in any way.

OTHER

I understand that I will not be paid for being audio taped or for the use of the audiotapes.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:

If I want more information about the audiotape(s), or if I have a question or concerns at any time, I can contact:

William Carlin

Educational Leadership Department, Temple University

267-644-5541

Temple University

Ritter Hall 266

Philadelphia PA 19122-6091

This form will be placed in my records and a copy will be kept by the person named above. A copy will be given to me.

PLEASE PRINT

Subject's Name: _____

Date: _____

Address _____

Phone _____

Subject's Signature

Date

APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Request for Protocol Review

A Qualitative Study of the Perceived Stress Levels of Middle School Principals in the No Child Left Behind Era.

Investigated by: William Carlin, Doctoral Student in the Educational Leadership Program at Temple University

Part I- Characteristics of Potential Subjects

A. About how many subjects will you need?

I will need approximately 10-12 subjects for this study.

B. Characteristics of Potential Subjects

The subjects for this study will be middle school principals in the surrounding Philadelphia area. I am looking for a 50/50 ratio of male/ female administrators. I am not excluding any subject because of age, gender, economic status, ethnic origin, etc. The administrators that I am interested in are the ones who are school leaders whose schools have made Annual Yearly Progress only because there special populations were counted numerically under the statistical term “confidence interval”. Without the help of the confidence interval, these schools would have appeared on the State’s warning list for failure to meet AYP requirements.

C. Indicate any special subject characteristics such as persons with mental handicaps, prisoners, pregnant women, etc.

These subjects do not have any special subject characteristics that would make them vulnerable. If a female administrator does not want to participate in the study after becoming pregnant, I will exclude her from the study, or if she is already pregnant, she has the option to drop out at any point during the research study if so desired. This will be stated in the consent form attached to these protocols.

D. What is the general state of health of the subjects?

The subjects will be expected to be mentally and physically healthy. It is generally a prerequisite for school administrators in the State of Pennsylvania to be of sound mind and body in order to perform their professional duties. If it becomes apparent that a subject is mentally or physically unable to participate /complete the research, that subject will be released from the study.

E. Describe how you will gain access to these potential subjects?

I will use a Pennsylvania Department of Education Data Base (www.ayp.pa.net) in order to access all middle schools who meet the criteria of making Annual Yearly Progress through the use of a confidence interval. After gathering that information, I will send out letters and emails to prospective administrators asking them if they want to be part of the study.

F. How will subjects be selected/ excluded from the study?

Subjects will be included for participation in the study if their middle schools meet the criteria of meeting Annual Yearly Progress goals because of the statistical concept “confidence interval”. As stated before, no subject will be excluded because of race, gender, economic status or age.

G. If subjects are from an institution other than Temple University, please indicate the name of the office responsible for granting access to the subjects.

Please see attached letters for permission to access subjects. These subjects will come from surrounding Pennsylvania school districts and I will be informing each participating school district about the study.

H. If subjects are children, anyone suffering from a known psychiatric condition, or legally restricted, please explain why it is necessary to use these persons as subjects.

No children, or anyone suffering from a known psychiatric condition, or anyone legally restricted will take part in this study.

Part II- Experimental or Research Procedure

A. Please describe the intended experimental or research procedure. This should include a description of what the subject will experience or be required to do. Please attach a copy of all questionnaires or instruments to be used.

The overall purpose of this case study is to shed light on principal stress at area schools where there has been a discernable change in environment due to NCLB regulations. Judging from that broad standard, it would seem that any school would suffice since all

of the public schools fall under the NCLB blanket. However, I am looking for schools that have a few specific qualities, namely:

1. The school must meet all of the AYP standards for that particular school year.
2. The school must have met all of the AYP standards and achieved proficiency among subgroups through the use of a confidence interval or the Pennsylvania Performance Index. The use of a confidence interval is understood by school administrators that their school was/is close to being put on the NCLB accountability sanction list. The sanctions category includes principal removal and reconstitution of staff if progress is not demonstrated over a two year period.

From these two basic qualities I want to address the issue of perceived pressure generated from the NCLB mandates on the educational leaders of particular schools. *By asking a series of questions in interview form* (copy of questions are attached), my plan is to illuminate the effect of stress (or non-stress) a principal may be feeling as a result of being so close to NCLB sanctions. This interview will be recorded using audio, and will then be transcribed for research purposes. At this point in time there is a tremendous amount of literature re: general principal stress, but there are few recent (2007- present) studies showing how principals are coping with the demands of NCLB stressors. I would like this study to fill in the gap in the research by interviewing these principals and collecting their strategies for dealing with the overwhelming stress of making AYP for every sub-group.

B. Will the subjects be deceived in any way?

No, the subjects will not be deceived in any way- the purpose of the study will be stated directly on the consent form.

C. To what extent will the routine activities of the subject be interrupted during the course of the study?

The routine activities of the subjects will not be disrupted in any way. I will give wide latitude to scheduling the interviews to times that are convenient to all of the subjects that agree to participate.

D. Indicate any compensation for the subjects.

A ten dollar (\$ 10.00) gift card to Starbucks Coffee House is being offered to compensate participants for their time during the interview.

Part III- Data Confidentiality

A. What procedures will you use to insure confidentiality of the data? How will you preserve subject anonymity?

When following IRB protocols, the main issue I am concerned about is the factual interviews the principals. I will have to develop an informed consent notice for each of the participating principals to read and sign before going forward with the study. The letter will be completely defined and all key facts of the study will be spelled out for them. Although not a technically vulnerable population, they may still be putting themselves in a compromised position if they feel they do not agree with their school district's philosophy of NCLB management. Therefore, in this particular case study, I will:

1. Establish a coding system in which each principal will receive a specific number that can only be identified by the researcher. The coding system will consist of

one number for each subject that participates. Example: Joe Smith, subject one, becomes subject number 1.

2. If it is desired by the participants of the study, I would also use pseudonyms if requested.
3. Since there is the use of audiotapes, I will guarantee that the tapes will only be handled by the researcher and will be stored in a specific safe in my private office with a combination only known to myself. I am also the only one with a key to my office, which is locked when I am not in it. I will be the only person who has access to the data collected.

APPENDIX E

Consent Form for Participation (See Attachment)

Part V- Benefits of the Study

A. How will any of the subjects benefit from participation in this study?

I believe there is a direct benefit for the research subject in that discussing this topic with an outside individual could illuminate their individual perceptions about NCLB stressors that may or may not be impacting their school. I am an administrator myself in the same type of middle school that the research is focusing on. School administrators are very much isolated by their unique job descriptions and need to communicate with others outside of their own school districts in order to get a balanced perspective about the tumultuous changes that are going on all around them because of NCLB.

B. How will society, in general, benefit from the conduct of this study?

I believe that society will benefit from this study because the research will illuminate what I think is a growing problem in K-12 education in America- the quick burnout of the principal and it's close relation to NCLB statutes. Principal training programs can benefit from this data by adapting their programs to incorporate NCLB realities and instruct participant in ways that will be helpful when they become building leaders. Strong building leaders who can tackle all of the pressures of running a building while meeting

NCLB requirements can only help America build strong students who will be able to compete in the global markets.

Part VI- Risks/Discomforts to Subjects

A. Describe any aspects of the research project that might cause discomfort, inconvenience, or physical danger to the subjects.

At this point I can't think of anything that might cause discomfort for the subjects. I am willing to do what I need to do in order not to inconvenience the subjects, and plan to be as flexible as possible in meeting their needs. There is no physical danger posed to the subjects during this study.

B. Describe any long range risks to the subjects.

There are no long term risks to the subjects who participate in this study.

C. What is the rationale for exposing subjects to these risks?

N/A Interview Questions for "A Qualitative Study of the Perceived Stress Levels of Principals in the No Child Left Behind Era".

Investigator 1: Corrinne Caldwell, Director, ELPS Program at Temple University

Investigator 2: William Carlin, Doctoral Student, Temple University.

1. What is your professional background in education? Did you always have an interest in being a principal, or did it evolve from being a teacher?
2. What were your feelings re: overall principal challenges before the introduction of NCLB mandates in 2002 ? Was it easier? Harder? The same?

3. What are your feelings now re: the perceived challenges principals face now that NCLB has been a part of your school culture for the last 7 years?
4. What interventions has your school created for the sub-group populations that were challenged by AYP in 2008-2009? How has your school culture changed or remained the same?
5. In the past 7 years since the advent of the NCLB era, have you thought about a career change or to a different position in the education world?
6. What do you see as the future for NCLB as it moves toward reauthorization? Should it be adjusted or go away completely? Would you encourage young educational professionals to become principals? Why or why not?
7. Do you think of the law as just affecting your own school, or are you aware of other schools that are on corrective action? How do you feel about their plight and do you think you might be next?

