The impact of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation on school leadership of two school buildings designated in need of improvement: An agency theory perspective

Susan Pecinovsky

University of Northern Iowa

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THE IMPACT OF THE NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND (NCLB) LEGISLATION ON SCHOOL LEADERSHIP OF TWO SCHOOL BUILDINGS DESIGNATED IN NEED OF IMPROVEMENT:

AN AGENCY THEORY PERSPECTIVE

A Dissertation
Submitted
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education

Approved:

Susan Etscheidt, Chair
Dr. Susan Etscheidt, Chair

Robert M. Boody
Dr. Robert Boody, Committee Member

Gene Lutz
Dr. Gene Lutz, Committee Member

Rick Traw
Dr. Rick Traw, Committee Member

Victoria Robinson
Dr. Victoria Robinson, Committee Member

Susan Pecinovsky

University of Northern Iowa

May 2005
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Dr. Susan Etscheidt, Chair
Dr. Susan J. Koch, Interim Dean

Susan Pecinovsky
University of Northern Iowa
May 2005
The purpose of conducting this study was to describe and analyze how NCLB has influenced school leaders in school buildings designated in need of assistance (SINA) and to the sanctions that accompany that label. Included in this study is the examination of the principal-agent interactions proposed in agency theory through the relationship of Iowa school leadership and the Iowa Department of Education.

From the 11 school buildings presently designated schools in need of assistance according to the Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act 2001 or No Child Left Behind, the school leadership of two school buildings participated in a case study over a period of six months.

The findings included congruence of interests between the student achievement requirements of NCLB and the administrator's interests. A clear hierarchical structure that controls the flow of information was evidenced. Information asymmetry did exist with the administrators having an informational advantage. Control and monitoring of results was necessary to assure that the agent was working on behalf of the principal. The leadership style was more assertive. Accessing the authority granted through the legislation limited the leadership's autonomy. The authority granted the leadership provided the administrators an opportunity to make necessary changes.

Findings from this study should be of interest to K-12 administrators, teachers, school board members, and other policy influential throughout the state and nation as it reveals the perceptions of the school leaders who implement federal mandates. It should be of particular interest to legislators in considering the design and implementation of current and future educational policy with school leadership in mind.
To Duane for his love and support, to Dr. Susan Etscheidt for her persistence and encouragement, and to family and friends who were there when they were most needed.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

When studying school reform, reviews of the more current literature invariably begin in 1983 with the National Commission on Excellence in Education (NCEE) and the publication of *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform*. This landmark report called upon the community, parents, students, teachers, leadership, and the state and federal governments to become involved in turning the tide of declining student achievement scores through extensive school reform. The Commission urged the federal government to take a leadership role in identifying the national interests of education, collecting data to inform educational decisions, improving the research on teaching and learning, and supporting curriculum improvement. The federal government responded through increased accountability legislation. It has been twenty years since that report, and the current federal prescriptive approach to school reform is the *No Child Left Behind (NCLB): Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in January 2001*.

By the year 2014, NCLB requires that all students reach proficiency as defined by the state assessment, a minimum of 95 percent assessment participation rate, a minimum of 95 percent average daily attendance rate for elementary and middle schools, and a minimum of 95 percent graduation rate for high schools. Failure to meet any of those requirements for a period of two years, a school building and/or district is designated in need of improvement (SINI). In Iowa, this designation is school in need of assistance (SINA).
Conceptual Framework.

Contemporary agency theory is a politics-oriented inquiry into organizational hierarchies that can be viewed as chains of principal-agent relationships or direct control, where the superior (principal) enters into a relationship with a subordinate (the agent) to produce the outcomes desired by the principal (Crowson & Morris, 1990). This theoretical framework provides an effective lens through which the impact of NCLB on public schools may be examined. The concept of a principal-agent hierarchy may be applied to public education: state education authorities are principals and local school districts are agents, school boards are principals and superintendents are agents, superintendents are principals and building level administrators are agents, and building level administrators are principals and teachers are agents. Clearly, the principal-agent hierarchical structure in education is quite complex with multiple layers. For the purposes of this study, the state education agency that enforces the NCLB legislation serves as the “principal”, while the superintendent and the building principals serve as the “agent” responsible for implementing the NCLB legislation.

Contemporary agency theory suggests three interactive patterns: conflicting goals and objectives, asymmetrical information, and control and monitoring to ensure the agent is working on the principal’s behalf. The principal has entered into a contract with the agent who has authority to act on the goals or interests of the principal. It is assumed that the agent finds the agreement to be in his own self-interests. If the agent’s interests are in conflict with the goals or objectives of the principal, the first issue of conflicting goals and objectives is evidenced. By the nature of the relationship, the agent has an
informational advantage as the principal does not have the necessary skills, resources, or information to achieve the preferred outcome. This informational advantage is called information asymmetry. If the agent is forthcoming with accountability information, the principal is confident that the agent is working on his behalf. If the interests of the principal and agent are in conflict, this information asymmetry requires an accountability system that controls and monitors the progress toward the principal’s desired outcomes. The principal must then determine how best to motivate the agent to achieve his desired goals and objectives.

Statement of the Problem

Eleven school buildings in the state of Iowa are currently designated schools in need of assistance (SINA). Given the requirements of NCLB, those numbers are expected to rise significantly. Following the national accountability requirements, leaders of these schools are and will be asked to reverse the trend of being a low performing school building with future sanctions looming if they are not successful. The educational leadership literature suggests that schools need not be subject to direct control by school boards, superintendents, central offices, departments of education, and other government agencies nor is there anything in the concept of public education to suggest that schools be governed through the present structure (Chubb & Moe, 2001). In fact, the educational leadership literature suggests that school-based management has become the agreed upon model through which schools operate. By design, there is a need for school leaders to establish a shared vision with the school community, to
collaborate with staff to achieve consensus in their decisions, and to operate in a climate of autonomous decision-making (Cranston, 2002).

Understanding the controversial nature of this legislation, the results should not be viewed as “pro-NCLB” or “anti-NCLB” but rather results of a qualitative study of seven school leaders responding to the legislation and the NCLB sanctions. The purpose of this study, therefore, was to describe and analyze how school leadership responded to their school being designated a school in need of assistance (SINA) and to the sanctions that accompany that designation. Using contemporary agency theory as the basis for the research questions, this study examined school leader responses through the lens of the principal-agent relationship. The impact of NCLB on school leadership may be examined by how the administrative agents respond to the interests, information, and accountability of the legislation enforced by the Iowa Department of Education, the principal.

These following research questions guided this study:

1. How does the school leadership negotiate the interests of NCLB and the local school building?
2. How does the information flow of NCLB requirements influence the school leadership?
3. How does the public accountability system of NCLB influence the school leadership?
Significance of the Study

The hope of this researcher was to gain insight into how legislative mandates influence the school leadership of a building that has been designated a school in need of assistance. Findings from this study should be of interest to K-12 administrators, teachers, school board members, and other policy influential throughout the state and nation as it reveals the perceptions of the school leaders who implement federal mandates. It should be of particular interest to legislators in considering the design and implementation of current and future educational policy with school leadership in mind.

Delimitations

School buildings chosen for this study were not intended to be a random selection, nor were they intended to represent all school districts in Iowa designated in need of assistance. However, descriptions of the districts in this study are provided to encourage the reader to make his or her own judgment about how the results may be skewed or well representative of other sites.

As the only interviewer and primary instrument for data collection in this study, the researcher is aware that she may have impacted this study by bringing her own feelings and prejudices to it as she makes meaning of the information gathered during the data analysis. The researcher also may have affected the data collected by the way she acts, questions, and responds during the interviews, as the researcher’s behavior shapes the relationship, and therefore, the way participants respond and give accounts of their experiences (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003).
Definitions

Contemporary Agency Theory: Contemporary agency theory is a theoretical framework for understanding the phenomena associated with the delegation of authority and the resulting loss of control (Lauk, 1996).

No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB): This is the Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. The four basic principles of the reform are 1) increased accountability for student performance, 2) reduced bureaucracy and increased flexibility, 3) expanded options for parents, and 4) a focus on what works to improve instruction.

Proficiency: In the state of Iowa, proficiency is defined by students achieving at the forty-first percentile or above as measured by the Iowa Test of Basic Skills or the Iowa Test of Educational Development.

School In Need of Assistance (SINA): This term references Iowa’s terminology for a school building or district that does not meet proficiency requirements in reading and mathematics, and soon to include science, as defined by the state for two consecutive years. In the third year of failure, the state of Iowa designates the building or district as being in need of assistance (SINA).

School In Need of Improvement (SINI): This term references the federal definition for a school building or district failing to meet proficiency as defined by the state for two consecutive years. In the third year of failure, the school building or district is designated (SINI). Once designated, sanctions are imposed that are cumulative.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

The central purpose of the literature review in this qualitative study is to assist the reader in understanding the data sought and analyzed. The review of literature is organized into three separate but related parts. The first section begins with a review of NCLB legislation, the second section provides a review of the agency theory literature, and the third section provides a review of the accountability systems literature with special attention to performance-based accountability.

No Child Left Behind

With increased federal spending and disappointing results in student achievement scores, the federal government took legislative action to exert further leverage over the outcomes of public education than had ever been previously experienced. President George W. Bush, Jr. signed into law the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB): Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act Legislation in January 2001. The purpose of the legislation was to close the achievement gap through a "systems" approach, which held states responsible for the implementation of a system of sanctions and rewards that would hold school districts and/or school buildings accountable for improving academic achievement (Iowa Department of Education, 2003).

NCLB's basic premise is that districts and/or school buildings must demonstrate adequate yearly progress or have negative sanctions imposed on them as required by the legislation. The requirements are annual progress toward the goal of achieving student
proficiency in reading, mathematics, and science by 2014. All students in designated grades must achieve proficiency including several subgroups. These subgroups include low socio-economic status, race, migrant status, students on individual education plans, and English language learners. The legislation also requires a minimum of 95 percent assessment participation rate, a minimum of 95 percent average daily attendance rate for elementary schools and middle schools, and a minimum of 95 percent graduation rate for high schools. In Iowa, student achievement progress is reported on an annual basis for grades 4, 8 and 11. Beginning 2005-2006, progress in student achievement will be reported annually for grades 3-8 and 11 in reading and mathematics. In 2007-2008, progress in student achievement will be reported annually for grades 5 and 11 in science. In addition, participation rates, daily attendance rates, and graduation rates are reported annually. Failure to meet expectations in any one of these areas for two consecutive years results in a school district and/or school building being designated in need of improvement. In Iowa, this is referred to as a School in Need of Assistance (SINA). This designation results in negative sanctions that may affect the school building and/or the school district. The imposition of sanctions depends on whether or not a school building is receiving Title One funds. If a building is receiving Title One funds and providing services to students with those funds, building level sanctions are imposed. If the building is not providing Title One services, district level sanctions are imposed as described below.

For a Title One funded building that does not meet adequate yearly progress for two consecutive years, the designation of SINA is applied to the school building. With
the first year of the SINA designation, the students are allowed to transfer to another
school building within the district that is not identified as SINA. The local education
agency must provide the transportation. With the second year of the SINA designation,
supplemental educational services must be provided. A supplemental service might
include an approved tutoring program, after school program, or learning center program.
The choice of supplemental services is at the parent’s discretion with the understanding
that services must be chosen from the state-approved list. The local education agency
must pay for the service with no more that five percent of their Title One Part A
allocation. With the third year of the SINA designation, a school district must institute
one or more of the following: replace staff, change management authority, institute new
curriculum, appoint an expert to assist the school building, extend the school year or day,
or restructure the school. With year four of the SINA designation, the school building
may reopen as a public charter school, replace all staff relevant to the failure, provide an
outside management contract, or turn the operation of the school building over to the
state. The list of sanctions for years three and four are not exhaustive, but the examples
provided indicate the intent of the legislation.

For school buildings not receiving Title One funds, district level sanctions are
imposed for failure to meet accountability requirements. For a school district that does
not meet accountability requirements for two consecutive years, the designation of SINA
is applied to the school district. With the first year designation, the school district must
implement an improvement plan with specific measurable targets. Failure in subsequent
years can result in the following state actions: replace local education agency staff,
remove public schools from district jurisdiction, appoint a receiver for the district, 
restructure the district, or authorize students to attend another district. 

Eleven school buildings in the state of Iowa have been designated in need of assistance. 
The school districts are experiencing parental choice, curricular changes, provisions for 
supplemental services, personnel changes, and the possible loss of funding. 

Considerable controversy exists regarding federal intrusion and accountability 
requirements for local school buildings and districts. As Elmore (2002) has pointed out, 
performance-based accountability systems are largely unproven social experiments with 
underspecified designs that lack evidence of effect on academic performance or dropout 
rates. Implementing an ambitious policy can be a formidable task. Past research on 
external change agents as reform mechanisms in K-12 education has shown that 
externally developed interventions tend to change significantly as they are implemented 
and adapt to local conditions and contexts (RAND, 2002). This variation in change 
occurs largely because there are so many players involved with numerous factors that 
must be aligned to support the change, which leads back to the capacity of the institution 
itself to implement change (RAND, 2002). 

According to Chubb and Moe (2001), the research in policy implementation that 
has guided reformers has been correct, but incomplete. They suggest a focus on the 
micro-world of schools has had a great deal to say about the effectiveness of the 
organization but little to say about the institution itself. What have been left unexplored 
are the institution of public education and the consequences of its bureaucratic structure.
Contemporary agency theory serves as a conceptual framework to explore the interaction of the principal and the agent in the organizational structure of public education.

**Agency Theory**

Barry M. Mitnick is credited with the development of the general organization of agency theory in 1973; however, it is Michael C. Jensen and William H. Meckling who presented the first significant general theory of agency in 1976. Jensen and Meckling built directly upon Mitnick's work, and they developed the consequences resulting from a separation of interests between the managers and the owners (Lauk, 1996).

Contemporary agency theory describes the implications for organizations around a separation of interests between the principal and the agents: conflicting interests and objectives between the principal and the agent, asymmetrical information, and the monitoring and controlling of the agent's behaviors to assure the agent is doing what he promised (Lauk, 1996). The principal has entered into a contract with the agent who has authority to act on the goals or interests of the principal. It is assumed that the agent, in accepting the authority of the principal, finds the agreement to be in his own self-interests, as well as the interests of the principal.

However, if the agent's interests are in conflict with the goals or objectives of the principal, the principal may have to turn to his powers of persuasion as the first issue of conflicting interests becomes evidenced. Conflicting interests frequently exist in an agency relationship that is comprised of human beings, and the literature would suggest that because the private sector does not have market mechanisms in place to restrain behaviors the opportunity to pursue self-interests is maximized (Lauk, 1996). The
principal’s dilemma is to determine how best to “restrain behaviors” that are not congruent and to motivate the agent to meet the principal’s goals (Lauk, 1996). To motivate the agent, the exchange of financial resources, individual incentive programs, or sanctions may be imposed by the principal. Information that activates the agent’s values and beliefs that are aligned to the principal’s preferred outcomes may also motivate the agent (Lauk, 1996).

Successfully motivating the agent within an environment of competing goals remains the challenge for the principal. Theoretically, contemporary agency theory suggests, “within the rational choice paradigm it is assumed that rational, self-interested individuals will try to maximize their own welfare within the contexts of their organizational reward structures” (Crowson & Boyd, 1987, p.6). In this study, if the interests of the Department of Education, the principal, are congruent to the interests of the school leaders, the agents, the latter will be motivated to reach the goal of student proficiency. If the interests are in conflict, the principal must motivate the agent to meet the proficiency goals.

The second issue is asymmetrical information. Information symmetry suggests both the principal and agent have access to the same information. However, in the principal-agent relationship the equitable distribution of information is inherently problematic. The principal contracted with the agent in response to a need. Moe (1984) argued that a principal “may seek out an agent for various reasons. Often he may lack specialized knowledge or legal certification that the agent possesses, and sometimes the size or complexity of the task simply requires coordinated action by persons other than
himself (p.756). The principal-agent relationship is dependent upon the agent having an advantage in the information necessary to complete the task, as the principal does not have the necessary skills, resources, or information. Lauk (1996) considers this challenge:

Asymmetric information, also sometimes referred to as information(al) asymmetry is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, the agent has been selected precisely because he has an information advantage. The agent has better information than the principal and is supposed to make informed decisions based upon the information. However, the problem arises when the agent hides or distorts the information from the principal (p. 117).

Arrow (1985) discusses this problem:

In the hidden information problem, the agent has made some observation that the principal has not made. The agent uses (and should use) this observation in making decisions; however, the principal cannot check whether the agent has used his or her information in a way that best serves the principal’s interests (p. 39).

If the agent is forthcoming with the accountability information, the principal is comfortable in the knowledge that the agent is working on its behalf. With an performance-based contract, accountability information is the methodology for measuring the agent’s performance. In this study, the Department of Education, the principal, relies on accountability information from the school leaders to evaluate the agent’s progress toward the goal of academic proficiency. In evaluating the agent’s efforts, the principal is dependent upon the information provided from the agent (Lauk, 1996).

A principal-agent relationship that is subject to this information asymmetry may produce situations known as adverse selection and moral hazard (Lauk, 1996). Adverse selection arises from the unobservability of information, beliefs, and values on which the
decisions of the agent are based. The principal cannot know any given applicant’s true
capacity or desire to complete the task and must rely on other indicators, such as
education, employment history, and recommendations. The opportunity for
misrepresentation emerges as the principal wants to hire the best candidate and the best
candidate wants to be hired. All individuals have the incentive to make the same sorts of
claims in order to secure the position (Moe, 1984). Lauk (1996) explains further:

Adverse selection occurs when a potential agent misrepresents his ability to
perform for the principal. It is related to the issue of control and monitoring
because the principal has no way to judge or monitor the ability of the agent in
advance. The principal’s monitoring abilities are extremely limited and must
largely be taken at the agent’s word. Adverse selection describes the principal’s
problem at the front end of the relationship, unable to judge accurately whether
the agent is able to perform the promised tasks (p. 157).

Adverse selection presents challenges of a different kind when reform is mandated.

Ferris (1992) explained this phenomenon through the lens of district level reform:

The mandatory plans present a different problem. There is not the suspicion that
the school will act opportunistically as in the voluntary case. But the district
should be cautious about not only the possibility of inadequate ability but also the
lack of interest on the school’s part. If there is a willingness but a question as to
ability, technical assistance is necessary. However, if there is a lack of interest as
well, the district will need to cultivate the interest of the key actors at the school
site (p. 342).

Ferris (1992) would suggest that districts assess their capacity to determine the scale of
implementation for any reform effort to minimize adverse selection.

Another consideration of information asymmetry is moral hazard. Moral hazard
occurs once the individual has secured the position and is now expected to work toward
the goals of the principal.

Moral hazard arises from the unobservability of actual behavior in the ex post
contracting situation—here, after an applicant has been hired. The employer
cannot know for sure to what extent the individual is productive and instead must ordinarily rely upon proxies—e.g., quality of reports, timeliness, diligence (Moe, 1984, p. 755).

When the agent is aware that information asymmetry exists, there may be a temptation to act upon the information in such a way that runs contrary to the principal’s interests and may lead to a behavior called shirking (Lauk, 1996). Eisenhardt (1989) describes shirking as “the agent may simply not put forth the agreed-upon effort” (p.61). Perrow (1986) defines shirking as the agent “substituting leisure for work” (p.229). Moe (1984) summarizes the concept, “Shirking behavior, therefore, is an aspect of moral hazard, with the incentive to shirk deriving from underlying information asymmetries” (p. 755). Whether “moral hazard” will result in this situation and how the Iowa Department of Education will respond was explored in this research.

The principal must determine how to best cope with this problem recognizably inherent in this relationship. Clearly, the school leadership of a SINA building, the “agent”, has an informational advantage over the state education agency, the “principal”. Proximity to the learning experience and evidence of student achievement provides the advantage to the school leadership. Recognizing this information asymmetry, the “principal”, the state education agency, will monitor student achievement through adequate yearly progress reports.

Because of information asymmetry and the possibility of conflicting goals and interests, the third issue of monitoring and control emerges. The level of trust between the principal and agent may be tenuous at best, as the principal cannot guarantee that the agent is working on his or her behalf. Therefore, the principal is engaged in an ongoing
process of monitoring and controlling both the agent’s behavior and the outcomes of the relationship (Lauk, 1996). The choice of the control mechanism is most frequently based upon the outcomes defined in the relationship, an accountability measure. The benefits to the principal must be balanced with the resources necessary to monitor and control the agent. Pratt and Zeckhauser (1985) reference this phenomenon: “We tend to get less monitoring, or monitoring of poorer quality, when monitoring is expensive and/or substitutes for monitoring are cheap. The agency loss is the most severe when the interests or values of the principal and agent diverge substantially, and information monitoring is costly” (p.5).

The point of diminishing returns must be recognized in the cost analysis of any principal-agent interaction. Legislatures and politicians will face the same question with NCLB as the cost of monitoring student performance and school quality is weighed against the intent of the legislation and the benefit to public education.

The principal-agent interactions proposed in contemporary agency theory may assist in examining the local school building’s response to federal accountability requirements. The contemporary interpretations of agency theory are organized around three interactive patterns: conflicting interests or objectives between the principal and the agent, asymmetrical information or uneven distribution of information, and the control and monitoring of agent behaviors. This conceptual framework will limit agency theory to the contemporary interpretations. For school leaders, contemporary agency theory provides logical predictions about what rational individuals will do if placed in the principal-agent relationship (Wright, Mukherji & Kroll, 2001). This study will examine
the principal-agent interactions in school buildings designated SINA. For the purposes of this study, the designation of SINA will apply to school buildings that have not met adequate yearly progress for at least two consecutive years and are receiving Title One funds.

**Accountability**

The concept of accountability seems quite simple. In terms of the economics of organizations (Moe, 1984), the concept is based upon one party, the principal, interacting with another party, the agent, to produce an outcome that will meet the needs of the principal. Thinking about student performance, the principal or regulatory agency is seeking to improve student achievement and expects the agent or local school district to produce the desired result. However, accountability is not quite that simple. To better understand the complexity of accountability systems, Adams and Kirst (1999) have identified six themes that provide a framework for the operations of an accountability system: identifying principals and agents, authorizing action, managing agents’ productivity, defining accounts, ensuring causal responsibility, and promoting agent compliance.

The principal-agent relationship is the center of the accountability design. The principals who demand accountability are numerous; national and state politicians, judges, bureaucrats, business and professional associations, special interest groups, textbook and test publishers, educational administrators, teachers, and parents. The role of the principal in education shifts depending upon the context of the interaction. Once the roles are defined, the principal and agent enter into a transaction that holds the agent...
responsible for specified actions. With the new educational accountability, the focus has shifted to the school building level with the state, the principal, calling upon the building principal, the agent, to increase student achievement scores (Adams & Kirst, 1999, p. 474).

Authorizing action occurs once the transaction has taken place, and the principal commissions the agent to perform a certain task. Through clear mandates, indicators of performance, and development of agency expertise, accountability creates and controls autonomy in public agencies. Through accountability, there is an emphasis on restraint and checking the exercise of autonomous power by aligning performance with the principal’s expectations (Adams & Kirst, 1999, p. 475). By design, the autonomous nature of school leadership is held in check by mandating performance expectations.

The management of agent’s productivity is defined by how agents are to accomplish their task, how much discretion they might exercise, and how much the principal will invest in the agent’s actions. Accountability systems are defined by their focus on agent behavior, agent performance, and agent capacity strategies. Different strategies require different design requirements for the system. Behavior-oriented designs operate under rules, reprimands, and sanctions to deter noncompliance. Performance-oriented designs provide both pressure and support through training opportunities and technologies that will provide agents with the necessary skills to perform the task. The agent is encouraged to perform because of positive incentives. Performance-oriented systems are more durable as the agent assumes the responsibility for the organization’s performance; however, the agents come and go and with them go...
the expertise necessary to continue the process. Capacity-oriented systems operate through the training opportunities and technologies that support capacity building efforts, which serve as a positive influence on the agent. Administrators function as steward of the organization through management of the resources to achieve the desired outcomes. Organizational capacity is tended over time and requires long-term maintenance. While more sustainable, the capacity-oriented design is more complex and costly to operate (Adams & Kirst, 1999, p. 476).

NCLB is a blend of the performance-oriented design and the behavior-oriented design. With the performance-oriented design, there is a focus on performance goals and promotion of worker's efforts to attain them. The accountability lies in the agent to achieve the performance goals. The oversight of the progress toward the goals is through a system design of evaluation and reinforcement. With the behavior-oriented design, accountability resides with rules and reprimands with negative sanctions to deter noncompliance. NCLB includes clearly established performance goals. The tracking of progress towards the NCLB goals is based on an adequate yearly progress. While the accountability lies within the agent, negative sanctions for not demonstrating adequate yearly progress for two years results in the administration of sanctions. NCLB specifies clear rules and reprimands for non-compliance. For the purposes of this study, NCLB will be referenced as a performance-based accountability system with the understanding that the complexity of the legislation speaks to both a performance-oriented and behavior-oriented accountability design.
A reporting mechanism that explains and justifies the actions taken by the agent is fundamental to a performance-based accountability system. In this context, educational accounts explain and describe school performance. The choice of indicators and explanations will determine the utility of the accounts to the system. The indicators should measure the features of quality schooling, what is critical for students to know and be able to do, provide information that is policy relevant, focus on schools, allow for fair comparisons, and balance information’s usefulness against the burden of collecting the data (Adams & Kirst, 1999, p. 477). The “indicators” have been defined for public schools through the state regulatory agency without their input or consideration.

Elmore (2002a) would suggest that accountability systems without internal capacity building efforts to meet the performance requirements, only speak to half of the equation:

Accountability systems do not produce performance; they mobilize incentives, engagement, agency, and capacity that produces performance. Accountability systems do not, for the most part, reflect any systematic coordination of capacity and accountability, nor do they reflect any clear understanding of what capacities are required to meet expectations for performance and where the responsibility for enhancing those capacities lies. A more specific and coherent theory of action for accountability systems would help.... Whose responsibility is to assure that these conditions are met? If it is the state that initiates the accountability requirement, then it is the state’s responsibility to assure that the capacities are in place to meet those requirements (2002a, p.13).

NCLB has articulated academic achievement in reading, and mathematics with accountability defined through proficiency levels. No provisions are in place to assure the internal capacity of those responsible for the implementation of the accountability requirements.
In accountability systems, ensuring causal responsibility is defined as action or inaction that causes a particular result. Causal responsibility highlights the contribution of principals and agents to the desired outcome, and it may be explicit or implicit. Explicit causal responsibility means agents are aware of their obligation to act. They exercise discretion in possible courses of action, possess sufficient knowledge to predict the consequences of their action, possess the resources necessary to accomplish the task, and they can directly influence the result. Implicit causal responsibility occurs when any one of these factors is missing. Accountability systems that define expectations for student performance must develop educators' or educational agencies' through explicit causal responsibility, and as necessary, adjust the standard of accountability to which these agents are held (Adams & Kirst, 1999, p. 478). At present, NCLB functions through implied causal responsibility with a clear obligation to act, and sufficient knowledge to predict and influence the result. However, the task must be accomplished without the resources or discretion to determine the most appropriate course of action.

Promoting agent compliance is a matter of enhancing the motivation and capacity of the agent to achieve the goals. School leaders are assigned the role of accountability agents for student performance, and as such, the accountability system must provide necessary resources to build the capacity to perform as expected. The challenge to accountability systems is to structure incentives that will effectively motivate school leaders to pursue the accountability goals. Schools must then act to ensure student achievement is aligned with state expectations, the principal, and they must be held accountable for the reporting of results (Adams & Kirst, 1997, p. 480).
Performance-based "new educational accountability" has introduced several important shifts in public education accountability (Elmore, Abelmann, & Fhurman, 1996). First, governors and state legislators play roles that are more prominent in education through the development and implementation of policy. Second, states focus their efforts on high academic standards with indicators that described performance. Third, accountability systems are linked with consequences for not meeting expectations, and fourth, the school building is the focus for accountability through reporting of student achievement data. Early evidence has shown that student achievement scores on prescribed assessments have influenced what happens in the classroom (Murnane & Levy, 1996). However, "test-based accountability without substantial investments in internal accountability and instructional improvement is unlikely to elicit better performance from low-performing students and schools. Furthermore, the increased pressure of test-based accountability alone is likely to aggravate the existing inequalities between low-performing and high-performing schools and students" (Elmore, 2002, p.4).

A blended performance-based accountability system provides many challenges for school leadership. NCLB wants to improve student performance for all students at the national, state, and local level. This type of large-scale mandated accountability reform with sanctions for not meeting expectations is a new phenomenon for school leaders. With external interventions being applied proportionately to how well schools are demonstrating improvement in student performance, the necessary leadership skills and orientation to implement such an accountability mandate will depend upon the position of the school building or district. If the school has demonstrated persistent and
dramatic failure, assertive leadership with external interventions may be necessary. However, if the change is to be sustained, it will depend upon activating the ideas and intrinsic motivation of the staff members to develop an internal commitment as participants in this change process (Fullan, 2001a). The role of school leaders will be to mobilize their staff and create a common set of expectations for accountability that will align with external state accountability criteria (Adams & Kirst, 1999 p.486).

With the principal-agent relationship at the center of accountability design, the theoretical constructs of contemporary agency theory provide educators an opportunity to make logical predictions about a rational individual’s performance when placed in this relationship and organizational structure (Wright, Mukherji & Kroll, 2001). These predictions may better prepare school leadership to implement the responsibilities associated with NCLB.

Current literature on organizational control in the hierarchy of public education is limited at best. A theoretical framework that might describe the control mechanisms in public education and how those mechanisms influence leadership within the local school setting appears to be lacking. In addition, there has been little attempt to examine the systematic application of controls to the educational organization and the organization’s response to those controls. Some studies do suggest a cause-effect relationship between organizational control and the public bureaucracy; however, the topic of organizational control on leadership in public education has received very limited attention in the research (Jentzen, 1993).
Of the three available studies on organization control in the hierarchy of public education through a contemporary agency theory framework, two have focused on the superintendency. One study (Jentzen, 1993) focused on the superintendent-principal relationship in teacher evaluation. The findings of this study would suggest that application of contemporary agency theory identified a number of superior-subordinate relationships that influence, control, and appear germane to the understanding of what takes place among school administrators when they undertake the task of teacher evaluation.

The other study (Crowson & Morris, 1990) focused on the superintendency and school leadership. Contemporary agency theory provided the conceptual framework that guided this study in examining organizational hierarchies and the role of the superintendent. The findings of this inquiry would suggest that there are at least three centralized contributions of the superintendent that may be important leadership functions within a balanced system: the allocation of responsibility for "risk", the capacity to attend to a district-wide "big picture" or the understanding of the system as a whole, and an integration of the school district and community norms and values. Both studies concluded that an agency relationship was found to exist, and in fact, the agency relationship contributes to the maintenance of a more balanced system of centralized and decentralized institutional structures.

The third study (Lauk, 1996) focused on contemporary agency theory and school-based management organizational structures. It too found contemporary agency theory to be an appropriate lens for analysis of school-based management. In addition, the issues
of asymmetric information and moral hazard have not been demonstrated to be a
significant problem due to the nature of public schools, while conflicting interest and
control and monitoring appear to be the most salient issues demonstrated in a
decentralized governance structure.

All three studies called for further inquiry into the use of contemporary agency
theory as a theoretical framework for the study of the principal-agent relationship in the
organizational structure of public education. This study will contribute to that body of
research using contemporary agency theory as a conceptual lens through which the
leadership of two school buildings designated SINA and the organizational structure may
be analyzed.

School reform and accountability have been synonymous for the last several
decades with no clear direction or path to the successful implementation of initiatives that
will result in increased student achievement. It would seem quite simple. If the federal
government through accountability legislation sets the expectations or control
mechanisms, then school leadership will have clear direction as to the necessary steps to
increase student achievement results with punitive outcomes if not successful. However,
school reform and accountability are not quite that simple. To be comprehensive, an
understanding of school reform and accountability must include a study of the institution
of public education’s response to the control mechanism or accountability legislation.
The purpose of this study is to provide such an understanding.
The educational leadership literature would suggest that several components of the No Child Left Behind legislation are incongruent with quality leadership. With clearly established goals and prescribed behaviors necessary to attain the goals, the opportunity for collaborative decision-making or a more democratic style of leadership may not be necessary. Such an accountability system is predicated on external control, while the current educational literature would emphasize the importance and necessity of internal accountability. Elmore states:

The work that my colleagues and I have done on accountability suggests that internal accountability precedes external accountability. That is, school personnel must share a coherent, explicit set of norms and expectations about what a good school looks like before they can use signals from the outside to improve student learning. Giving test results to an incoherent, atomized, badly run school doesn’t automatically make it a better school. The ability of a school to make improvements has to do with the beliefs, norms, expectations, and practices that people in the organization share, not with the kinds of information they receive about their performance (2002a, p.4).

The accountability design of NCLB contains no provisions to address internal accountability. With NCLB, accountability is externally mandated with limited discretion in the decision-making process to determine the course or direction for student achievement in public schools. Such an emphasis on external accountability is in direct contrast to the educational literature.

The authoritarian nature of NCLB runs counterintuitive to the leadership literature on autonomy. Sergiovanni’s (2000) point is cogent:

Character in leadership requires enough autonomy for leaders and for those they represent to actually decide important things. Where there is no autonomy there can be no authentic leadership, and no authentic followership can emerge. Without autonomy, character is lost (p. 18)
This loss of character or authentic leadership can only lead to “adaptation for survival” as Cook (2004) explains:

If it is assumed that the locus of control is outside the organization—in the likes of social, demographic, political, and economic factors and in pressures from special-interest groups, including state and federal agencies—then the highest aspiration of any planning will be adaptation for survival. And those in the organization can only suffer the enervating sense of hopelessness and despair (p. 2).

If the educational leadership literature is accurate, then the checks and balances of autonomy in the accountability design will lead to unfavorable conditions for reform or change.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Research Approach

The focus of inquiry for this study was to better understand how school leaders respond to their school building being designated a “school in need of assistance” and to the sanctions that accompany that designation. The study explored the relationship between the Iowa Department of Education and school leaders responsible for the implementation of the No Child Left Behind (2001): Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. The study focused on the school leaders as the “agent” with their interests explored through a series of interviews. Representatives of The Iowa Department of Education were not interviewed. Existing documentation concerning NCLB, the Iowa Department of Education Accountability Plan, and guidelines were used as the source of information. It was not clear how this study might have proceeded differently had both the Department and the school leaders provided interview data.

Accordingly, it is not the intent of this study to make broad generalizations that would explain or verify the response of all school leaders to this legislation. However, according to Bogden and Biklen, “If you want to know about the process of change in a school and how the various school members experience the change, qualitative methods will do a better job” (p.40-41). While there is no one, best method of approach for a study, the purpose of the study should heavily drive the methodology employed. The qualitative approach was a good fit to describe the complex nature of school reform and its influence on school leaders.
As a consultant for an Area Education Agency (AEA), the researcher has been involved in the development of the Iowa Statewide Support System for schools designated in need of assistance (SINA). Each AEA has a three-member team that provides technical assistance to schools in need of assistance. The three-member team consists of a support team lead and two support team members. While no previous relationship with the school leadership participating in this study existed, the researcher is the Support Team Lead for their SINA buildings for a two-year period. In that role, the researcher provides technical assistance and support as the buildings implement their action plans to increase student learning. As one of several initiatives that the researcher is responsible for as an employee of the AEA, the success or failure of a SINA building is not a reflection upon the researcher. This role required absolutely no evaluation responsibilities at the building, district, or state level. For this study, it is assumed knowledge lies in the research participants and is defined by their perceptions and social environment. As such, the researcher was not an active participant in the study, limiting the possibility for conflict of interests.

Research Design

The constant comparative method is a research design for multiple data sources with formal data analysis beginning early in the study and nearly completed by the end of the data collection. While there are several steps to this approach, the steps are not linear and actually are occurring simultaneously with the researcher constantly doubling back to revisit the data collection and coding processes (Bogden & Biklen, 2003). The data are collected with attention to recurring issues or themes that are categorized and coded. The
30 categories are explored with an account and description of the diversity of interests that appear in the data. The researcher continually doubles back for more data and further analysis with a final analysis that is focused on the core categories (Glaser, 1978).

Site Selection

Across the country, 8,000 school buildings are designated in need of improvement as of September 2003. As NCLB is just beginning to unfold nationally, there have been no studies that consider the school leadership’s role in a district or building that has been designated in need of improvement. This study focused on the leadership in school buildings designated in need of improvement, the selection of buildings was based on the following criteria:

1. As a result of not meeting requirements for academic achievement, the school building must have been self-identified or on the watch list for a minimum of two years.

2. Because of not meeting requirements for academic achievement, the school building must be in at least its first year identified as a school in need of assistance as defined by the Iowa Accountability Plan.

3. The school building must be receiving Title One funds.

There were eleven school buildings fitting the criteria in the state of Iowa in 2003. After reviewing a list of the school buildings with that designation and considering location, logistics involved in the interview process, and time commitment involved, central Iowa was the most feasible location choice. This purposeful sampling resulted in two school buildings that most closely reflected all the necessary criteria. The district
superintendent was contacted by telephone to schedule a personal meeting with the researcher.

At that meeting, the superintendent was provided a formal letter that included the background on the researchers credentials, an accompanying description of the project, and logistics associated with the interview process with full disclosure of the goals and use of the findings from this study. The researcher was prepared and responded to all questions the superintendent had before he granted his permission for this study in the district. The decision of the superintendent to provide the necessary authority to gain entrance into the two school buildings led to the final selection of the school district and buildings to be involved in the project.

Pilot Study

A small pilot study was conducted two months before the study. The purpose of the pilot study was for the researcher to practice interviewing skills, questioning strategies, and the questions that would help structure my study. The pilot study consisted of two interviews that were approximately each one-hour in length with the superintendent of the district that had school buildings designated in need of assistance. The interviews were conducted at the central administration office with a period of 30 days between each interview.

Following all of the interviews that were conducted, the researcher reviewed the tapes, recorded reflections of the interviews in an interpretation log, and designed question guides that would facilitate the next interview. Serving as an audit trail, the interpretation logs chronicled the data collection and interview process. The utility of the
interpretation logs was enhanced as an opportunity to interpret, analyze, and raise questions that would set up the following interview. The question guides served as a framework for the interviews, but the interviews were not limited to those questions. During the interview process, the question guides were extended by probing and follow-up questions.

As the study progressed, a theme of leadership began to emerge that aligned with the research on successful corporate structures and their leaders. The review of literature revealed several factors that included: the “right people” are the most important asset to an organization, the ability to confront the brutal facts and to believe that you will prevail is essential, transcending competence to discover your core business leads to greatness, the organization must have a culture of discipline, technology is never a primary means of transformation but a tool, and moving from a good to a great organization never occurred through one defining action but is a process (Collins, 2001). This study initiated an interest in these particular characteristics of leadership.

Initially, the researcher had thought to confine the superintendent’s remarks to the pilot study. As the pilot study progressed, it became clear that the superintendent’s perspective would add greater depth to the study and went beyond the intent of the pilot study. The researcher chose to include the interviews in the study and conduct an additional interview with the superintendent toward the end of the data collection process. For the purposes of this study, this set of interviews previously referred to as the pilot study will be identified as the Upper Administration Site Report.
The Conceptual Framework

From the pilot study, a relationship could be articulated between the school leaders and the Iowa Department of Education. Principal-agent relationships are evidenced throughout public education; state education authorities are principals and local school districts are agents, school boards are principals, and superintendents are agents, and building level administrators are principals and teachers are agents. The pilot study supported the state education agency as the “principal” entering into a relationship with the “agent”, the school leader, to produce the desired outcomes (Crowson & Morris, 1990). Contemporary agency theory explains the interactions between principals and agents. These interactions are addressed through three interactive patterns: conflicting goals and objectives, asymmetry of information, and control and monitoring to ensure the agent is working on behalf of the principal. The interactions evidenced in the pilot study validated the use of contemporary agency theory as a conceptual framework.

The Participants

The focus of the inquiry and the research design suggested a purposeful sampling of school leaders who are responsible for school buildings designated in need of assistance. The sample is intended to provide a variety of perspectives but is not necessarily representative as might be found in a quantitative study. For the purposes of this study, there are two school buildings in the study. One of the buildings is a second year SINA building with the other being a first year SINA building. Both buildings are designated for student achievement and one is designated for participation. There are seven leaders responsible for the two school buildings, including the superintendent. Out
of the seven participants, all but one has spent most of their professional careers within this school district. Six of the building leaders were male and two of the building leaders were female. All but two of these leaders were African American. To protect the anonymity of the participants, pseudonyms were used for the participant’s names.

The superintendent provides leadership for the district and for the two buildings designated in need of assistance. Mr. Dan Hill is in his second year as superintendent of the Urban Community School District. Before his position as superintendent in the Urban Community School District, he had served as a superintendent in two others school districts. Serving as a principal for over 15 years in two different districts and as an instrumental music teacher before moving into a principalship, Mr. Hill has a variety experiences with a diverse group of constituents. The superintendent is new to this school district; however, his background includes both teaching and administration within the state and outside of the state. He has been a leader in a small school district, an affluent district, and a more urban district.

Building A has two principals who share their responsibilities through a co-principalship. As a leadership design, the co-principalship was a direct result of looking at leadership differently for a building in need of assistance. Mrs. Sandra Miller is one member of this partnership. She comes from an elementary background as a classroom teacher and is in her second year as a principal for Building A. Mrs. Miller has spent her entire educational career in this school system. Mr. Ronald Johnson completes the partnership. For over seventeen years, Mr. Johnson has been in the Urban Community School District. While his entire educational career has been in this system, he has
served in a variety of the secondary attendance centers. He has served as a classroom teacher, assistant principal, athletic director, and for the last two years as a building principal. Both Ms. Miller and Mr. Johnson hold a master’s degree in educational administration. They are involved in various committees at the building and district level such as the building leadership team, School A Site Council, and the Parental Involvement Committee. Both are involved in the community through their respective church organizations.

In addition, Building B has four school leaders with one principal and three assistant principals. The principal is Mr. Richard Smith. Mr. Smith has been an educator for 33 years. With the exception of one year, his educational experience has been in the Urban Community School District. The majority of his work has been at the secondary level as a teacher, an assistant principal, and for five years as principal of Building B. An assistant principal, Mr. Brian Jones has a total of twelve years experience with all of his experience in this school district. For the most part, his work has been as a teacher in an alternative high school setting. He has three years of administrative experience with one year in Building A and two years in Building B as an assistant principal. Mrs. Mary Trent is also an assistant principal in Building B. She has served in Building B for four years. Before this administrative position, Mrs. Trent was a social studies teacher for 12 years at one of the high schools in the district. Finally, there is Mr. Mathew Randall. Mr. Randall has been in this district for 17 years as both a teacher and an administrator. As an administrator for seven years in Building B, Mr. Randall has served as assistant principal. Each of the assistant principals serves as a member of the administrative team,
but they also provide leadership for a specific grade level. Mr. Mathew Randall provides leadership for the 6th grade staff. Mrs. Mary Trent provides leadership for the 7th grade staff, and Mr. Brian Jones provides leadership for the 8th grade staff. The number of years the participants served as building leaders ranged from 2 to 7 years.

Upon receiving the Superintendent’s commitment and verification that he had spoken to the building leaders, the researcher contacted all eight leaders by phone to officially invite them to participate in the interviews. The researcher shared her background and credentials, a description of the project, logistics associated with the interviews, the goals, and the plans for using the results. All the participants agreed to monthly interviews for a period of six months.

Data Collection

Over a period of six months, a series of in-depth, one-to-one interviews served as the primary data source for this study. All the interviews took place at the school buildings. This was in response to the leadership’s request as it is extremely difficult for them to leave their buildings during the day and many had evening commitments as part of their responsibilities. A series of open-ended questions was designed before each interview to provide a starting point with sufficient flexibility for emerging issues. To allow flexibility to change questions while maintaining an overall structure, the interviews were patterned around main questions, probes, and follow-up questions (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). Given the complexity of the educational setting, there were many times that the researcher arrived to find unexpected delays to the interview process. The researcher honored the disruption, and sometimes, the participant discussed these events.
before the actual interview. With a familiarity that added richness to the interview process, these spontaneous conversations became part of the data collection process.

**Interview Questions**

The interview questions were used as a starting point for our conversations. Although the interviews were relatively open-ended, question guides were employed to focus the interviews around particular topics. Even with a question guide, the researcher had a great deal of latitude to pursue a range of topics and offer the participant an opportunity to meld the content of the interviews (Bogden & Biklen, 2003). With the intent of gaining comparable data across subjects and sites, the question guide was a useful tool to focus the interview process without being so rigid that the interview process would be compromised.

On occasion, the interviews began to turn in a direction that while interesting were not related to the question. The researcher’s facilitation skills as a consultant were especially helpful in bring the conversation back to the focus while honoring the participant’s contribution. Upon reflection, this additional information added greater depth to the description, and at times, proved to be a catalyst for future questions.

The conceptual framework developed and extended throughout the pilot study guided the interviews. The guiding questions for the initial interview were:

1. To what extent has the interests of NCLB influenced your building level work?
2. How do you balance the building level interests with the NCLB interests?
3. How is information communicated to and from the regulatory agent, the Iowa Department of Education?
4. To what extent has public accountability influenced your building level work?

The Interviews

The district and building administration received notification from the Iowa Department of Education in August of 2003 that two of their school buildings were designated in need of assistance. For Building A, this was a new phenomenon, and for Building B, it was the second year. The buildings submitted corrective action plans to the Department that outlined their response to being designated a school in need of assistance. The plans were approved October 31, 2003. Members from the Iowa Support Team, the building leadership team, and the district worked collaboratively to implement the corrective actions stated in the plan.

The buildings had existing building leadership teams. These teams provided leadership in the initiation and follow through to the action plans. Meetings were conducted on a monthly basis to facilitate and monitor the action plans. Early dismissals every Wednesday were set aside for the professional development opportunities that aligned with the plan. Opportunities for parental involvement were offered throughout the year with extra attention given to the barriers to parental involvement: schedules, location, and transportation.

Locally developed assessments were used to collect formative data. At the building level, these data were reviewed and interpreted on a monthly basis. The Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) was given as a pre and post assessment providing both formative and summative data. Although the ITBS is most often discussed as a summative assessment, this district and buildings found implementing the assessment
more than once served to provide formative data that was helpful in their decision-making process at the building and district levels. The building leadership team analyzed the data and made any necessary adjustments to their practices. The school leaders participated on these building leadership teams, but the teams were a collaborative effort.

The interviews began in December 2003. The average interview time was approximately 30-45 minutes for each participant. Due to unexpected conflicts, some interviews were postponed or extended. All participants were interviewed for a minimum of three hours over a period of six months. One participant was interviewed four different times, two participants were interviewed five different times, and three participants were interviewed six different times.

At the participants’ request, the interviews were conducted in the participant’s office or a conference room. All the interviews were audio taped and transcribed by a third party. Interpretation logs were written during and following each interview to capture the body language, facial expressions, and the interruptions that added to the context and content of the interview. The interpretation logs provided a personal account to track the development of the project, to determine how the research plan was affected by the data collected, and how the data were influencing the researcher (Bogdan & Bilken, 2003). The interviews followed along a continuum with the first interview being less fruitful as the researcher and the participants were getting to know one another and concluding with the last interview that seemed to be a conversation between two colleagues as opposed to a more structured interview.
Coding of Interviews

Coding is the formal representation of analytic thinking (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). After the first month of data collection, data were transcribed and initial coding schemes were developed. This served to complete the coding process in a timely manner with coding categories that guided the subsequent interviews to insure the information collected represented the variety of data desired. With all of the data sources, the coding process was progressive. The researcher tested the preliminary codes by reading the data, trying out the codes, rereading the data, changing the codes when others seemed to be a better fit, until a fixed set of codes and subcodes began to rise to the surface (Appendix A). These codes also remained open to the possibility of new data entry. The data were scrutinized to determine assignment to the categories and subcategories with the understanding that data units might apply to more than one category. Categories were modified, new categories were developed, and old categories discarded without an attempt to come up with a right coding system. This process provided the organizational framework for the data analysis (Bogden & Biklen, 2001).

Data Analysis

Interpretational content analysis was the data analysis method. This repetitive process involves finding constructs, themes, and patterns that can be used to describe or explain a certain phenomenon being studied (Gall, Gall & Borg, 2003). Segmenting the data into initial codes, developing categories, and challenging those findings through a constant comparative examination was the ongoing process throughout the study.
In qualitative research, data analysis and data interpretation are interwoven, and it is difficult to determine where one begins and the other starts. Two aspects of the study guided the data analysis and interpretation: the conceptual framework and the pilot study.

With contemporary agency theory as the conceptual framework, the study could be focused around three interactive patterns: conflicting goals and objectives, asymmetry of information, and the control and monitoring necessary to ensure the agent is working on behalf of the principal led to an analysis of the impact of accountability on leadership behavior. Each of these three patterns guided the collection of data. The initial data collected from the first set of interviews and the pilot study established an initial set of codes. From the constant comparison of the initial set of codes to the conceptual framework, categories could be established. As a result of this constant comparison examination, a set of categories and subcategories that linked back to the three patterns of contemporary agency theory were solidified and refined while others were deleted. The conceptual framework with the constant comparison of data, codes, categories, and subcategories established parameters that made such a multiple site study theoretically relevant.

The pilot study was an indicator of the feasibility of the conceptual framework and the questions that guided the ongoing interviews. The feasibility of the conceptual framework was the organizational structure that controlled the scope of the study. With this conceptual framework as the parameters, questions were developed to guide the interview process. The interview protocol was practiced with the Superintendent of the district for buildings in need of assistance. This practice allowed the researcher to
integrate the interview questions into a conversational style while simultaneously learning to pace the interviews to honor the 60-minute time frame. With the analysis and interpretation of the data collected, the conceptual framework was considered for its authenticity as a viable foundation for this study. In addition, the literature review for the leadership aspects of the study began to emerge. It was through the pilot study that a focus on the criteria of successful leaders in corporate America began to focus the literature review. With the practice of this pilot study, the researcher was confident in the conceptual framework, the initial interview questions, and the literature review conducted in the area of leadership.

Although not planned, the pilot study proved to be more than an opportunity for the researcher to practice her skills. Through the initial data gathering process, it became clear to the researcher that the interviews with the superintendent were necessary to present a more holistic picture of the role of leadership in buildings designated in need of assistance. While the principals could share their stories at the building level, the superintendent provided a district-level perception of the events as they unfolded. It seemed important to share the connection between the district and building leadership roles in this uncommon occurrence. The work of the superintendent and the building principal are so heavily intertwined that eliminating the perspective of the superintendent would limit the interpretation of the data as it focused on the agent-principal relationship. With the opportunity to extend the understanding of this relationship, the researcher decided to pursue further interviews with the superintendent and include the data in this study.
Analysis of the Site Data

With each interview, the researcher reflected upon the tenets of the conceptual framework, the initial codes, and categories initially established in the pilot study to help make sense of the data collected. The interpretation of the data collected was formative and continued throughout the study. Each interview provided an opportunity to revisit the conceptual tenets, coding categories, and subcodes to speculate as to validity of the coding categories and to take risks regarding future questions and categories (Bogden & Biklen, 2003). Multiple interviews allowed the researcher to check her understandings throughout the process.

From the first round of interviews conducted for each site, the individual interviews were systematically and carefully reviewed from audiotape transcripts and interpretation logs. Following the review of the first interviews, interpretation logs were written that articulated the researcher’s thoughts, feelings, and questions. The data from the first interview transcripts were segmented into an initial coding scheme of 26 codes (see Appendix A).

After repeated readings of the initial set of codes, the data were carefully reviewed to identify significant phenomena that shared similarities that could be considered instances of the same constructs (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003). From the constant comparison of these constructs to the conceptual framework, it was possible to classify the initial codes with the three patterns established by the conceptual framework. The patterns of the conceptual framework emerged as the core categories of my coding system. These core categories included consistency of: conflicting goals and objectives,
asymmetry of information, and control and monitoring. The additional category of leadership was added to the core categories to be inclusive of those data that articulated the conceptual understandings of leadership.

Matching the most recent interview transcripts to the previously coded interview, the initial codes became inadequate to articulate the discrete nature of the data being collected. As evidenced in the Appendix A, the initial codes were too global to capture the finer distinctions emerging from the data. Furthered by the constant comparison and examination of the initial codes within the core categories of the conceptual framework, it was necessary to clarify the meaning of each code. To bring a sharper distinction within the conceptual categories, the initial codes were subdivided. This subdivision of codes permitted a discrete classification of the data collected to ensure the scope of data necessary to provide a comprehensive interpretation and analysis.

Categories and subcategories emerged from the comparing and contrasting of the conceptual categories with the most recent data collected and codified. These categories and subcategories were solidified and refined while others were deleted to elaborate further the clearly emerging categories and subcategories necessary to articulate the rich description of this data collection process. As seen in Appendix B, this clarification provided guidance in determining which categories were most important for further study and which questions might be developed for the upcoming interviews. This constant process of comparison and revision of categories was repeated until this study was brought to completion for the individual site reports and the expanded pilot study (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003).
As suggested by Bogdan and Biklen (2003), data analysis is the process of systematically searching and arranging the interview transcripts, field notes, and other materials accumulated do enable a presentation of findings. Analysis involves working with the data, breaking it down into manageable parts, organizing them, synthesizing them, and searching for patterns, themes, and construction. Running concurrent with the data collection process was the constant comparison of the data to the conceptual framework. The conclusions being tested throughout the data collection process supported the contribution of contemporary agency theory as a rational explanation for the behavior of school leaders who found themselves providing leadership for schools designated in need of assistance.

The three patterns of conflicting goals and objectives, asymmetry of information and control and monitoring were present in my analysis. Had the data not supported this organization, the conceptual framework would have been discarded. However, the patterns were insufficient to provide a comprehensive interpretation of the data collected. As a fourth category for consideration, the area of leadership was added.

The category of leadership was added and supported from the business literature focusing on the characteristics of leaders who grow and sustain successful corporate structures. The leadership category was narrowed to this conceptual understanding in an effort to narrow the scope of leadership as an area of study and to align the entire study with the organizational literature from the business community. The business literature posits a far more extensive review and study of the hierarchical relationships evidenced in public education. The patterns supported through this analysis and the conceptual
framework included the right people are the most important asset to an organization, the ability to confront the brutal facts and to believe that you will prevail is essential, transcending competence to discover your core business leads to greatness, the organization must have a culture of discipline, and moving from a good to great organization never occurred through one defining action but is a process (Collins, 2001).

This study initiated an interest in the particular characteristics of leadership and the agent-principal relationship. The questions that began and guided this study remain relevant as a result of the data analysis. The following research questions guided this study:

1. How does the school leadership negotiate the interests of NCLB and the local school building?

2. How does the information flow of NCLB requirements influence the school leadership?

3. How does the public accountability system of NCLB influence the school leadership?

Throughout the analysis, the conceptual frameworks of contemporary agency theory and of leadership were useful in describing and interpreting the data. With all three questions evidenced, the most influential elements of the research questions as they relate to the leadership of schools designated in need of assistance were negotiating the interests of NCLB, the flow of information described as a hierarchical structure defined by the organization, and the public accountability system inherent in NCLB.
Cross-Analysis of the Site Data

The analysis of the data collected at each site and the pilot study invited a cross-analysis. School leaders serving different buildings described similar feelings, thoughts, and rational of the events they were experiencing simultaneously. While one building had been in the process longer than another, the commonalities across the findings were compelling. This study would be incomplete without a cross-analysis of the site data.

The final phase of the data analysis was to review the various data sources. The site reports, the pilot study, and the interpretation logs were examined across case for common initial codes, core categories, and sub-categories. From the site report analysis, the researcher was not surprised by the common findings that emerged across all of the data sources. These findings were compared to the themes established in each report and the conceptual framework of this study. Through a comparison and contrast of the site reports to the conceptual framework and the emerging themes, the data analysis was further refined, thoroughly examined, and brought to closure (see Appendix C).

Across respondents at each site, the conceptualized categories of conflicting goals and objectives, asymmetry of information, and control and monitoring were supported and evidenced in the data collected. The literature reviewed on leadership as a component of the conceptual framework was validated as a timely description of the challenges being faced by leaders of schools in need of assistance. Through both contemporary agency theory and the research on business leaders, there is an opportunity to further our understanding of the behaviors expected and required of school leadership who are in such circumstances.
Validity and Reliability of the Study

Understanding that traditional thinking of validity and reliability do not apply to case study data and interpretations, the following criteria were used to establish the interpretive validity of this study: usefulness, contextual completeness, researcher positioning, and reporting style (Gall et al., 2003). First, a study may be useful if it enlightens the individuals who read the study (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003). As NCLB and its implications are new to public education, this study may serve to enlighten and share information with the readers as it pertains to school leadership and negotiating the interests of NCLB. Second, the researcher provided a complete, contextual framework for the study including a history of school reform, the significance of this particular reform effort, the physical setting and environment of the school buildings, and the demographics of the community in which these school buildings reside. According to Gall, Gall, & Borg, (2003), “The more comprehensive the researcher’s contextualization, the more credible are her interpretations” (p.462).

To further develop the contextual framework, perceptions of the participants involved through the on-going interview process were explored. Throughout the interview process, each participant was asked to respond to a series of questions. Based upon their responses, there was an opportunity to probe further on a particular question or follow-up with a different question to better understand their perceptions. Multiple interviews with each participant allowed the researcher an opportunity to revisit areas of interest and provide further support for each participant’s perception. Throughout the
interview process, the researcher remained open to the diversity of opinion and interests shared by the participants. The length of time and number of interviews with each participant provided an opportunity for the researcher to continually check the accuracy and completeness of her understandings (Gall et al., 2003).

Third, the researcher’s interpretations are more credible and useful if she demonstrates a sensitivity to the content of the study and how she relates to the situation being studied (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003). The researcher in the study shared her role and how it related to the study, particularly her role as a consultant and support team lead for the SINA buildings and the district. Finally, the researcher’s choice of reporting styles can influence the validity of the reader’s interpretations of the findings (Gall et al., 2003). To the best of the researcher’s ability, the interpretive findings were presented in a manner that was credible and authentic.
CHAPTER 4
FINDINGS

This study was designed to gain insight into how legislative mandates influence the leadership of school buildings designated in need of assistance. This chapter begins with a site report from the superintendent with each of the two school buildings designated SINA following. The chapter is completed with a cross-site analysis and discussion of the findings that provide the basis for conclusions related to the research questions.

Site Report: Upper Administration Study

Located in an urban area, the patrons of the school district are largely blue-collar with the largest employer being manufacturing. The entire student body totals 10,402 students distributed among twenty sites. The district houses two high schools serving students 9th-12th grade, four middle schools serving students 6th-8th, and fourteen elementary schools serving students from prek-5th grade. Demographically, at the time of these interviews, 15% of the students were enrolled in special education with over 50% of the student population eligible for free and reduced lunch. The ethnically heterogeneous student body was more than 32% minority with 11 different languages spoken.

Located on the south side of the community, the central administration building is a brick two-story with a smaller building in the rear of the complex. A large parking area is an invitation for visitors to park closest to the building. The building and grounds appear to demonstrate a sense of pride in the place that houses the leadership of the
Urban Community School District. The entry of the building displays a large welcome mat with the district’s emblem boldly displayed. The lobby sparkles and shines from the efforts of a maintenance staff that cares about the appearance of their building. Off to the right is a small sitting area with information about the school district. A smile comes from the woman behind the registration desk who was always warm and friendly. On the way to the superintendent’s office, an administrative assistant greets visitors and serves as an ambassador for the school district.

Brown and black is the predominant color scheme in the superintendent’s office with evidence of color on the bookshelves that line the walls. The inspirational artwork focuses on leadership. While this room sets a tone for leadership and learning, family pride is also evident. Books on leadership and learning are interrupted by family photographs. Superintendent Richard Hill is new to the school district and is in his second year of the superintendency. His background includes both teaching and administration within the state and outside of the state. Superintendent Hill holds a Master’s Degree in Educational Administration with a Specialist in Educational Administration and a Doctorate in Educational Administration. Superintendent Hill had acquired 12 years of experience as a superintendent before serving the Urban Community School District. As a teacher and a principal, his career has spanned 21 years. Hill has been an administrator in a small school district, an affluent district, and a more urban district. He spent his teaching career as an instrumental music instructor.

Superintendent Hill provides leadership through his participation in local, state, and national organizations, such as AEA Superintendents, Big Brothers/Big Sisters,
Cedar Valley’s Promise, Rotary Club, Phil Delta Kappa, and the Urban Educational Network. He will benefit from all of these experiences as he faces the newest challenge to public education, NCLB.

Findings

The findings from the Upper Administration Study are organized around the three interactive patterns of contemporary agency theory: conflicting goals and objectives, asymmetry of information, and control and monitoring. Within the three interactive patterns, the following themes emerged: congruence of interests, the influence of informational flow on leadership, the influence of internal accountability on leadership, and the influence of public accountability on leadership. Although not part of the conceptual framework, the additional category of leadership was added to the emerging themes to be inclusive of those data that articulated the conceptual understandings of leadership.

Conflicting Goals and Objectives

Contemporary agency theory holds that if the agent’s interests are in conflict with the goals or objectives of the principal, the first issue of conflicting goals and objectives is evidenced. The first research question explored this possible interaction: How does the school leadership negotiate the interests of NCLB and the local school building? The interview data revealed several interesting themes from the administrator’s responses.

Congruence of Interests

The superintendent of this school district believes that inherent in the district’s ability to reach the goals of NCLB are the congruence between the district’s interests and
the interests of NCLB. Superintendent Hill remarked, “If any of those pieces are not lined up together, then we are not going to succeed. So, the benchmarks and standards, the district goals, and the NCLB issues have to be aligned or we won’t get there.” He spoke of four areas influenced by the congruence of the district’s interests with those of the state and federal governments: 1) the welcomed intrusion, 2) a focus on the student achievement gap, 3) the support for a results-oriented approach and 4) the challenge to reach proficiency.

The welcomed intrusion. For this school leader, NCLB is not perceived to be an unwelcomed intrusion on his work. Even with the concern for timelines and sanctions, he sees the necessity for such legislation to jump start work that has been stagnant.

Speaking to the concerns, Superintendent Hill explained:

It takes three to five years to turn things around academically to where all kids are performing consistently. NCLB doesn’t give you that much time. The legislation is set up where you are on a watch list in one year if you don’t perform up to a certain standard, and the next year you could be designated a SINA. In a short period of time, whether it’s all the students or subgroups, you are in a situation of being in a sanction mode. It is a quicker response.

Such a short time line to evidence an increase in student achievement requires the superintendent to re-think the day-to-day business of public education. Referencing one of the SINA buildings with a history of poor student achievement, the superintendent stated:

It is about time somebody cranked it up. School A has been operating the same way for the last 15 years. Nobody seems to have jumped up and down going ballistic about it. It has been that way for a long, long time. Was it acceptable before? No. Did we worry about it as much before? No, because that was just those kids. I think it is a little bit of a wakeup call.
Wake up call or not, the intrusive nature of this legislation appears to be welcomed and has caused the district leadership to move quickly to change the current course of action.

Focus on the student achievement gap. Congruence between the superintendent’s interests and the interests of NCLB brought a focus to the achievement gap, particularly the focus on subgroups. This particular part of the legislation was recognizably challenging for the administrator. As Superintendent Hill shared:

We are the poster child for NCLB without question. Our white students are scoring at or above the state average. The students of low SES [socio-economic status] are not. The students who are ELL [English language learners] are not. Our special needs students are not. Our minority students are not, especially our African-American students are not. So, leaving NCLB in those subgroups for our district clearly is exactly what the legislation was passed for because our district seems to be able to take care of one set of people while the other groups are not performing at the same standard.

Superintendent Hill appreciates the interest in all students achieving and supporting the proficiency goals. The reasons for low student performance must be investigated:

Right now the attention is called to the teachers in the classroom, principals in the building, administrators in the central office, and the school board, they can’t say a subgroup can’t score. We have to find out what is the reason. Why is it that some students in a subgroup can score well? Why can’t the others? We have to put programs together to make sure all students can read and do math at grade level, which is pretty much what NCLB is asking. They are not asking for an “A” student. They are asking for math and reading, soon to be science at grade level. That is what they [the federal government] are asking. So, how do you say it is okay for kids to not be at grade level? It is not okay.

This superintendent understands that his role as an instructional leader involves closing the achievement gap:

Clearly the other groups, SES, minority population, and ELL students who can speak the language, we ought to be able to get them through. Normally, they can score at the level the state is asking. As a superintendent, I am trying everything I know how to do to push students forward seeing them perform at a higher level.
With an emphasis on increasing student achievement for low performing students, the superintendent has initiated bold efforts to support the student learning process and minimize the poor student achievement. Reading on grade level has become a focus. Innovative measures are being implemented to bring low performing students up to grade level. Superintendent Hill described one program, The Excellence Team, which is focused on increasing reading comprehension:

We have a group of kids sitting there, and we can’t just let them sit. They do go to other things. They go to lunch with the other kids. They go to art, P.E., and other stuff with other kids. But, they are in a pull out program [The Excellence Team] right now that their parents have signed them up for…. If you are three or four years behind in reading comprehension, you can’t make the leap in one year. You might be able to do it in two years, but it would be very, very hard to do that. Of course, we’re using time differently. Instead of doing social studies and science [in Excellence Team], we’re doing math and reading, language arts double time…. Anybody can learn anything given the right amount of time. Some kids take a longer time to learn to read, and we are spending time on that…. They [students in the Excellence Team] know they’re struggling readers, and they don’t want to be struggling readers. I mean they know that it’s hard for them. You know if I have a pebble in my shoe, and I have to limp because it hurts every time I put my foot down whatever I have to do to get rid of that is what I’m going to do…. The whole idea is I can’t read. I know I can’t read. I don’t like to read. I don’t like school because I can’t read…. There are a lot of places in school that you have to read and understand. So, I would imagine it would take at least two years to really get kids that are four grade levels away or three grade levels away to be able to grow a year or two and get there.

The superintendent has implemented initiatives to alter the direction of student performance for those students that have struggled. While there appears to be congruence between the district’s interests and the interests of NCLB to address the achievement gap, the superintendent acknowledges the need for innovative measures to achieve innovative results.
Support for a results-oriented approach. The public announcement of a school building’s deficiencies alerted the superintendent to the need to openly discuss results and admit problems exist:

We disaggregated data, but we didn’t talk about the disaggregating of the data. The one thing that we are doing a good job of right now is that we are talking about the information. Good, bad, or ugly, this is what the picture looks like right now. We do an excellent job of that.

Discussing the results both internally and externally has led the superintendent to an important conclusion. No matter what efforts are undertaken, the results may not change:

There is some frustration right now among the teachers in the system because no matter what they do, no matter how hard they try, they cannot get off the list. It is like everything they are trying to do, and it is still not happening. That’s hard you know. The more we work on something; usually we get better at it. The harder they try and the more they work, they are still not able to make safe harbor or adequate yearly progress. There are some good teachers sitting there thinking this is ridiculous. Publicly, we have to be able to balance the fact that as an urban district we may always be on the list no matter how hard we try.

With an increased focus on results, the superintendent is willing to accept the challenge of NCLB.

The challenge to reach proficiency. In NCLB, all students are held to the same level of expectation, and for the most part, the instrument used to measure progress is the same for all students. Such expectations were challenging for Superintendent Hill:

If you give the best runner in the world a ten-pound bowling ball to put on their leg and tell them they have to wear it in the Olympics, they are not going to make it. No matter what they do or how hard they try, they are not going to make it. So, the intrusion on special needs kids, and the intrusion on ELL kids for me is insanity.

Dan Hill elaborated, “It is frustrating for me to think educated people believe that you could ask somebody that can’t read to take a test in English to find out what they know.”
Students with special needs and their participation in the adequate yearly progress calculation are very challenging issues for this superintendent. The Iowa Accountability Plan for NCLB requires that students with an Individual Education Plan (IEP) be tested on their academic grade level as opposed to their functional grade level. While modifications to the testing process are appropriate per the IEP, accommodations such as out-of-level testing result in a non-proficient status. The superintendent described the difficulty:

We have issues with the special needs students who in most cases are not asked to perform at the same level as their counterparts of the same age. They are asked to perform at a level they can perform at. NCLB does not allow them to be tested on any other level except the level by which their age would be relative to their grade level. So, while some of the kids would test at a lower level if they were tested out of level, it does not count. They go down as non-proficient. For us, that is an issue.

Superintendent Hill explained that due to the NCLB sanctions, there might be a tendency to look for a scapegoat among the student population that might explain the district or building’s lack of student achievement. Special education and ELL students may be a likely target as their ability to meet the state defined levels of proficiency may be hindered by factors outside the control of instructional practices. Superintendent Hill considered that the more knowledgeable the parents and the community are regarding NCLB, the less likely they will be to seek someone or some group to blame. While being aware of the fragility of the public’s support, it is politically advantageous for the superintendent to inform the public about the legislation and its limitations. This adds a new dimension to the role of the superintendent as Superintendent Hill explained:

Visiting publicly, this is on the minds of many people, and we put it on the minds of many people as a district. We have it on our TV station, on the radio, and talk
about it. We have met with the editorial board of the newspaper. So, we are putting it out there. It is not like we are hiding it. We can’t. We have to be upfront with who we are.

Superintendent Hill has readily accepted the challenge of NCLB to achieve proficiency for all students but has serious reservations concerning reaching the goal with English language learners and special education students: “Anywhere else, we bear no excuses. We don’t want to even think there is an excuse. For those two groups [English language learners and special education students], there is an excuse.” Attaining student proficiency is the goal for both NCLB and the Urban Community School District. However, Superintendent Hill believes that for certain subgroups achieving that goal may not be realistic.

There is a clear congruence between the interests of the Urban Community School District and the NCLB legislation. As a welcomed intrusion, the legislation has brought a renewed focus to student achievement and the achievement gap. Groups of students that typically have not done well academically may not be lost in aggregate data. NCLB and Urban Community School District are both endorsing a results-oriented approach and accepting the challenge to have all students be proficient in reading and math. While there are challenges to all students reaching proficiency, those challenges are being met with innovative use of classroom time and scheduling. Superintendent Hill realistically acknowledged that some students may never reach proficiency in the given timelines, but confirmed his belief that all students in the district “are our children” and deserve the opportunity to learn.
Asymmetry of Information

Contemporary agency theory suggests that by nature of the relationship, the agent has an information advantage as the principal does not have the necessary skills, resources, or information to achieve the preferred outcome. The second research question examined this interaction: How does the information flow of NCLB requirements influence the school leadership? Several themes emerged from the responses of the participants.

Influence of Information Flow on Leadership

For the most part, NCLB information is dispensed through a hierarchical structure. The federal government informs the state government who in turn informs the local school district. In the state of Iowa, the Iowa Department of Education is the regulatory agency. The Department of Education is interpreting the rules and regulations as they unfold. Superintendent Hill explained:

They are interpreting the rules as they are going along. So, we are having to have clarification constantly with some of the issues. We have voiced our dissatisfaction with ELL not having an alternative assessment. We have voiced our objection to how our special needs students are being asked to be tested in a way they have never been tested before. Some of it’s federal and the state can’t do anything about it. But, the ELL issue is state. They haven’t developed the test yet, and that is causing everybody with a high population of ELL students to really, really be concerned.

Yet, this superintendent also believes the Urban Community School District has a good partnership with the State Department of Education and understands their limitations, “They have been a good partner for us. They have helped us along the way. They have provided guidance as we have needed it and answered our questions as fast as they knew them.”
While the superintendent described the district’s relationship with the regulatory agency, he also shared that he has limited direct contact with the Iowa Department of Education as it pertains to NCLB student data. The size of the district necessitates that he depend upon the Educational Services Division to prepare and communicate their student achievement data on an annual basis. However, Superintendent Hill acknowledged his responsibility “to make sure we have met the deadlines and the information is accurate. I want to see it and talk about before it goes.”

The information flow of NCLB has influenced the superintendent’s leadership in two ways: First, he provided support to the building administrators and staff, and second, he increased communication with the public constituents. Taking a collaborative approach, the monthly principal meetings have been designed to provide support for the administrative staff. Tackling the NCLB legislation and the school buildings designated in need of assistance is a joint effort. Pushing to move forward and understanding the need for support, the superintendent summarized their efforts:

We have changed the structure of the meetings. They [the principals] are working together in teams of people. We have got much more support for them [the principals] than they had in the past. Whatever they need, we are going to be out there with teams of people to help them. They have to get some more help right now, especially with NCLB sitting there. It is not something they [the principals] try to figure out on their own or to move from point A to point B as a building.

Such support had not previously been the norm in this district. With the NCLB legislation, administrative support was critical to revitalize and support the building level leadership.

Informing and communicating with the staff has been the superintendent’s priority to minimize the discrepancies that might be communicated both internally and
externally. Dan Hill explained, “Our teachers are pretty well schooled in NCLB. I think I could take any teacher in this system right now and say tell me about NCLB, and you know they could tell you anything.” The superintendent depends upon the building level administrators to carry the NCLB message to their staff, so he is free to focus on the external communication of the message.

The role of a superintendent requires ongoing communication with the constituents. Community members and parents want their leadership to be informed and able to discuss the topic in a manner with which they are comfortable. With NCLB, that role has intensified:

You had better be able to do public relations or you had better have somebody with you that can do public relations. I probably speak to five or six thousand people face to face in a year; they ask questions that I have to be able to answer. I can’t say could somebody else come up and talk about this. If I were to go out and say what is wrong with NCLB about 55-56% of the population would go nuts. They are starting to look at it and list the things that are happening for their kids in school that they haven’t seen before.

For every stakeholder group, this superintendent believed he must be prepared to respond with a level of confidence and optimism.

Information flows through a hierarchical structure that involves a partnership with the Iowa Department of Education. This partnership guides the district through the regulatory requirements of NCLB. The information flow of NCLB has significantly influenced district leadership by requiring increased communication and support to the building level administrators and the public. It is important to the superintendent that staff members are informed about NCLB, but by the nature of his position, the public
most frequently seeks information from the superintendent. He relies on his skills in public relations to keep the community and parents informed.

**Control and Monitoring**

Contemporary agency theory explains that if the agent is forthcoming with accountability information, the principal is confident that the agent is working on his behalf. If the interests of the principal and agent are in conflict, this information asymmetry requires an accountability system that controls and monitors the progress toward the principal’s desired outcomes. The third research question was developed to explore these interactions between the State Department of Education and these administrators: How does the public accountability system of NCLB influence the school leadership?

**Influence of Internal Accountability on Leadership**

The internal accountability of NCLB has influenced the district leadership in three ways. First, the vision for the school district has become data-driven. Superintendent Hill believes the use of data must be operationalized at the building level as well as the district level. Second, the superintendent must address staff morale from the building administrators to the teachers. Finally, the superintendent must assure quality performance by educators in every classroom and expand the role of evaluation in ensuring a quality education for all students.

**Data-driven vision.** The public accountability of NCLB has encouraged the district to be more data-driven in their decisions around instruction, assessment, and learning environments. Intuition and gut instincts are not going to satisfy a public
looking for answers from a system that some believe is failing their children. Prior to NCLB, school districts were assessing students, collecting data, and reporting progress annually as required by Iowa House File 2272. However, there was a flaw in this chain of events as described by Superintendent Hill:

Our district was not a data-driven district before I came. They had data, but it was not driving what they were doing. They just were not letting the data drive what their needs were, and we are doing that now. We are educating our staff on what that means, what that looks like, and what that feels like, and how does that happen. But, that is not an overnight process.

This use of data has been a consequence of NCLB for many districts as they search for the answer to why students are or are not achieving at the defined level of proficiency. Superintendent Hill’s vision for the Urban Community School District is a data-driven future.

Addressing staff morale. As the superintendent of a large school district, Dan Hill accepts and understands that he cannot be at all of the building level meetings to monitor implementation of the district initiatives to meet the goals of NCLB. The role of the building level leader, the principal, is therefore critical to the implementation process. To remain connected to the work at the building level, the superintendent meets with the principals on a monthly basis. He explained, “We devote about two hours a month during our principals’ meetings, which this is all we talk about. What are the issues? What are the problems? What’s going on and then another hour of training a month as a group.” When asked about the efforts to close the student achievement gap, he stated:

I devote about thirty percent of my time to that. So, I am working with the Educational Services Division and the Student Services Division to monitor what they are doing, taking a look at where they are going and finding ways or other places to push them a little harder to seek other areas to work on. I know there
are other places we need to be going, looking at, or visiting, gleaning information from. So, I am not directing all of the traffic out of those departments, but I definitely have my hand in it. I have to.

Superintendent Hill sees a need for pressure and support for principals in buildings designated in need of assistance. Clearly, the ongoing lack of student performance is problematic for a superintendent, who must adhere to the political and instructional leadership elements of the position. To push too hard might damage relationships among the administrative team. To not push hard enough might encourage mediocrity.

Superintendent Hill acknowledged this dichotomy, “It is a delicate balance. The reason I say that is they [principals and assistant principals] are trying as hard as they know to try in most cases. For the most part, they have been doing everything humanly possible to get this done. So, we have to give them the resources and support along the way.”

Ultimately, the teacher will make the difference in student learning.

Superintendent Hill suggested that those closest to the classroom must also learn how to manage both the frustration and the public accountability that accompanies this legislation:

Parents want a good school for their kids. What’s happening internally with administrators and teachers is the problem. Again, this comes back to part of the problem with adequate yearly progress. No matter how hard they are working, they are not or can’t make it. In other words, no matter what their input is right now even if they see some increases, it is not enough. There is a lot of frustration. The weight of the requirements and some of the mathematics behind making adequate yearly progress is really frustrating for principals and teachers. But, as long as we are making progress and we’re moving toward the direction we should be moving, I don’t know that we can ask for a whole lot more than that.

Remaining connected to the work through a balance of pressure and support while building and maintaining relationships is believed to be necessary according to
Superintendent Hill. As the district’s administrative leader, Superintendent Hill must address morale at both the administrative and teacher level. NCLB’s internal accountability has increased the importance of that role

Assuring teacher quality. To raise the level of student achievement,

Superintendent Hill believes that a quality educator in every classroom is critical. For the Urban Community School District, NCLB has put emphasis on teacher and administrator evaluation and the Iowa Teaching standards (Appendix D):

We have all of our faculty using the Iowa Teaching Standards and the 42 criteria. We’ve changed our principals to a different evaluation tool as well. They’re using the Iowa Administrator Standards. There are six standards and about five criteria under each. They [teachers and administrators] are now being held accountable to a whole different set of standards than they were before.... For the first and second year teacher, there is a lot of leverage.... There is a high motivation for them to be able to demonstrate whatever it is they need to demonstrate in a classroom. As for our administrators, we’re looking at them through a different lens.

While initiating a new evaluation system for administrators, questions are being asked of teachers that relate to lesson planning, use of data, and strategies for their students.

Superintendent Hill described the process:

When a teacher says, “On Tuesday I gave a four question quiz as a little bit of a pre-test to see how many kids knew this... and I wrote my lesson plan accordingly because 80% of the kids in class did not know this skill at all.” We’re asking those kinds of questions. We’re asking people to be able to demonstrate those kinds of questions. In their lesson planning, they write the standard and the objective that they are teaching. Those kinds of things.

The lesson planning process and instructional delivery are carefully monitored:

There is monitoring that is going on in the classroom. What becomes monitored becomes important. So, we have team leaders at all the levels right now being trained in working with data-driven leadership. They are monitoring what is going on with the other assessments that are not the ITED or ITBS.... What is
going well and what is not going well, and they’re meeting as a team with the principal.

A focused effort inviting teacher evaluation has been emphasized, with the Iowa Teaching Standards serving as a tool to inform the evaluator. Demonstrating and monitoring performance at the classroom level is considered critical if the superintendent’s goal of quality teachers in every classroom is to be achieved.

The public accountability that is central to the NCLB legislation has also brought about a shift in thinking for some educators. Too often and too easily, the lack of student achievement was attributed to the child. The educators would look at one another, the home life, and the student’s background to provide a rationale for inadequate progress in student achievement. The superintendent acknowledged the unacceptability of those past perceptions:

I think quite honestly the teachers in the classroom, and maybe the community themselves were just saying, “Well, those kids can’t achieve. It’s just those kids.” Well, they can’t say that anymore. First of all, they shouldn’t have said it before, but it was happening, and clearly, that is why the federal legislation was born. NCLB communicates clearly the need for quality educators in every classroom.

Superintendent Hill must now assure quality performance from all teachers in the district:

You see people that aren’t working here right now because we made them sharpen their pencils to the point they didn’t want to do that anymore. So, they quit, retire, or we asked them to leave. I am not saying you just fire everybody. That is not how you get anybody better. But, if you and I are working together and everybody knows that I’m incompetent and you are my supervisor and allow me to stay unimpeded, that says it is okay.... The people that are falling short, that don’t care, and everybody knows who they are and everybody watches them do that, by doing nothing you are sending a huge message. So, I don’t mind doing that, and we have gotten rid of a few.

For the most part, poor teachers are the exception, not the rule. The superintendent elaborated, “We are probably talking about less than 5% of our teachers aren’t trying.
They walk in at 8:00 and leave at 4:00 and could care less. But for the majority of our teachers, they are trying really, really hard.” For Superintendent Hill, quality classroom teachers are the expectation. Yet, certain barriers within the organizational structure may detract from this goal.

Due to contract language that addresses teacher transfers, often the youngest and least experienced teachers are placed with the most challenging students. Superintendent Hill reported, “Our turnover has been huge there (Schools A and B). The schools that are not producing have been high turnover schools because nobody wants to teach there.” The union contract language supports transfers based upon seniority. The superintendent would like to see that addressed: “We really want to get the Union to agree to allow us the transfer language to let somebody in there we want in there and not let people in there we don’t want.” Trying to address the alignment of student needs with teacher expertise may require more than changes in contract language, but Superintendent Hill believes it is a place to start.

Superintendent Hill described the importance of the teacher-student relationship:

Every time you walk into a teacher that doesn’t either, have time for a student or gives up on a student, they weren’t a highflying teacher to begin with, and that student is going to lose. They need that teacher to be able to be there for them and to be able to give them that information. If the teacher doesn’t care about the student, all of a sudden we have a problem.

Quality teachers are instrumental in improving student outcomes. A teacher without high expectations for all students poses a problem to the district and the superintendent.
In response to NCLB, the superintendent’s data-driven vision has become increasingly important. He also sees an increased importance in addressing staff morale, and in assuring quality performance by building leaders and teachers.

The Influence of Public Accountability on Leadership

Public accountability has intensified the political nature of the superintendent’s role. There is no doubt that the role of a superintendent has always been political as the position ebbs and flows on the feelings of the constituency. With NCLB, this interdependent relationship has intensified. Having buildings within the school district designated in need of assistance, with the option to send your child to another building within the system, presents unusual challenges that have not been previously experienced:

When the public hears the district is on the watch list, which most of them are going to be, the politics expand and become more of an issue than they were previously to deal with because it is a very, very public reporting process. We reported publicly before NCLB, but there were no sanctions. So, when parents are given an opportunity to move their students from one building to another, that is a whole different world at that point. No question that the stakes are much higher than they were before.

Public accountability is new for academic areas in this school district.

Nevertheless, this superintendent believes that accountability is a benefit to public education:

When you have public accountability for something that changes the way you do business. I’ve known that for a long time, and there’s nothing wrong with that. If somebody is afraid of being publicly accountable then there’s something wrong right out of the shoot. Private schools have been publicly accountable for a long time to the people that pay tuition for their students to attend.... So, the only place that really hasn’t had public accountability are public schools and especially in social studies, science, reading, language arts, and math. Everybody else has had accountability. They’ve had art project fairs. They sing at concerts. Everybody
can see what the program is doing. It is visible to all. But, those five areas have not. While they are not playing anything on a Friday night, they are accountable now.

Public accountability for the academic areas has changed the way administrators do business, especially with a school building designated in need of assistance. The administrators are combating a negative public perception, while trying to involve parents in a learning process viewed as failing their child.

**Combating a negative public perception.** The role of the superintendent is political by its nature. As an ambassador for the district, the public looks to the superintendent for guidance. With two school buildings designated in need of assistance, the politics become more critical as community members re-evaluate the effectiveness of their schools. According to Superintendent Hill:

> We have a bunch of people watching us all the time. You know we talk about it. We work hard with what is being sent home to the parents and to the building principal to make sure that we’re explaining exactly what it is without scapegoating any one group. We tell them what the issues are.... But, by the same token, you can say the glass is half full or half empty, and we paint it half full, and these are the issues we’re still working on.

With the requirements of NCLB, painting an optimistic picture for the community and the parents of the school district is a challenge. However, the strategy for this school leader is to confront the public perception head on.

One strategy is to keep the board informed of the issues related to NCLB and what is not being shared through NCLB. The hope is to provide a comprehensive picture of the school district beyond NCLB; the superintendent shared what occurred at a board meeting to further understanding of the work in the district:
At our last board meeting, we showed them other things that we are assessing that they [the Board] need to hear.... The Board was amazed. What we were trying to show the Board is that NCLB is based on the ITBS. There’s a whole bunch of other stuff that we’re doing and here are some samples. We had five schools report. They reported their ITBS information, but they also reported other things that are not being measured through ITBS.... So, we have to remind the board this is one measurement and one snap shot once a year.... We have to celebrate the other things too that are going on because they are going on, and we are doing well.

One opportunity to attend to public perception is through the school board. Another way is through communication with the community.

This superintendent has taken a direct communication approach with no attempt to hide the reality of the situation: “We’re not afraid to say this is where the problems are. Before I think, we cloaked those things. We kept them under the table for whatever reason, or we didn’t talk about it publicly.” No attempt to hide, confront the reality and move forward -- this is the approach of the superintendent as the district continues to monitor and respond to the public’s perception of their school buildings named in need of assistance. One stakeholder group heavily invested in this perception is the parents whose children either attend or will be attending those school buildings designated SINA.

**Parental awareness and involvement.** Agreeing with building administrators that parental involvement is beneficial to student learning, Superintendent Hill realizes the socio-economic factors or social factors that might preclude a parent from being an active participant in their child’s education. The superintendent affirmed this challenge:

I think the research says the more parental involvement the more likely the kids are going to succeed. That’s not a rich or poor situation. Basically, if the parents don’t care about their kids, and they don’t care about anything else, we shouldn’t care about that kid. Or do we say, now we have to do it differently.... Then you have to be able to say, regardless of what the parent is doing, I’ve go to work with this kid, and I am going to have to do more than I did before or different things
than I did before because I’m not going to have parent involvement.... We can’t write them off. It is still our responsibility to teach all kids regardless.

Public accountability has influenced the administrator of this district. The academics are being held to a level of unprecedented accountability. With two school buildings designated in need of assistance, a negative public perception requires increased attention from Superintendent Hill. In combating negative perception, the superintendent has spoken publicly with the school board, community members, and parents about the facts related to NCLB and the schools designated in need of assistance. The increased contact with the school board, parents, and community are viewed as necessary and advantageous by Superintendent Hill.

Leadership

Emerging as a theme independent of the contemporary agency theory lens, the interview data revealed the necessity for the additional theme of leadership. The additional theme of leadership was further specified through the subcategories of assertive leadership, authority granted leadership, and lack of autonomy.

Leadership Style.

NCLB has changed how these school leaders conduct business. At the superintendent level, the political aspects of the position have taken center stage. Perhaps more so than any other position in a school district, the superintendent position is dependent upon public perception. There is a balance between informing the public and protecting the students served by this school district. As politically challenging as this legislation may be for school leadership, the NCLB legislation has resulted in a more assertive leadership from this superintendent.
Assertive leadership. When change is required, it is usually difficult. Even with the best intentions, change can be challenging. According to this superintendent, NCLB has allowed the leadership to move much more quickly to close the achievement gap:

Change from within is slow. Everybody is ingrained in what they’re doing. I don’t particularly care for this legislation in some respects, and in some respects, I do. All of a sudden, we are looking at things we weren’t looking at a lot before…. Change coming from the outside happens much faster because somebody says; guess what you have to do it. Even if you don’t want to do it, even if you don’t like to do it, or even if this may not be the way you would do it, now, you have to do it. That’s an easier sell… Pretend there is no NCLB, then the superintendent is a moron…. You run into some of that.

NCLB has allowed the school district to move quickly to initiate changes in their identified school buildings. In addition, NCLB has provided an opportunity to take some risks in achieving their goal of increased student achievement.

To achieve the proficiency goals of NCLB, innovative solution-seeking initiatives are being introduced to try to increase student achievement. Resources are being funneled into the elementary schools to “erase the problem before it gets there (the middle schools)” (Superintendent Hill). However, early education efforts do not eliminate the problem of students who are not at a level of proficiency today. Superintendent Hill’s response has included “pullout” programs to bring students up to grade level. The Superintendent explained, “We have an Excellence Team at School A, and if the data looks as good as we think it’s going to look academically, there were phenomenal differences there. We would like to go over to School B and do the same thing.”

The response from students has been positive. Superintendent Hill stated, “They know that they’re struggling readers, and they don’t want to be struggling readers.” These programs extend from the elementary into the high school to provide support services for
students throughout their educational career. Superintendent Hill’s hope is to move students up to grade level as quickly as possible with reading comprehension and fluency being the key.

To ensure continuity in a child’s educational experience, the student mobility rate must be addressed. Superintendent Hill elaborated:

We have kids whose parents play a rent game. They move five times a year, and they might be in five different elementary schools in one year. That’s unhealthy for the kids. So, we’re going to bus them back from wherever they started. We are going to start with two schools, and if it works like we think it’s going to, then we'll do that for all of our elementary.

Superintendent Hill responded quickly and assertively to NCLB’s accountability. Both the pull out programs and the transportation initiatives were the result of the influence exerted by the federal legislation.

Authority granted leadership. For a district with buildings designated in need of assistance, the alternative for not creating different results is the accumulation of sanctions that compound. To avoid that alternative, change must occur swiftly. The Superintendent described the benefits of external change or authority granted by NCLB:

The choice to change is not an option. There is more of a sense of urgency now that is more pronounced. And I don’t think that’s all that bad, quite honestly. You know change comes sometimes much easier from an external force than it does from an internal force. Because internally people are going to stay doing the same thing that they have been doing unless somebody gives them a reason not to or if somebody from the outside pushes. In this case, you know it’s a fairly good push. So, it’s not bad.

Such a “push” eliminates many of the usual political rumblings. NCLB speaks to all students being proficient in reading and mathematics and grants administrators the authority to realize that goal.
The authority granted to leadership through such legislation may help to quiet dissenting voices when it is no longer politically advantageous to speak out. As the superintendent explained:

We have a budget with only nine percent of it going to be able to be decided if we are going to put money over here or put money over here. The rest of it is all locked up in fixed costs.... So, now the Board of Education makes the decision to take one percent of that money and put it over here into something else, which in a sense takes away from other people from a more affluent situation. This happens all the time. The boardroom will be full of people saying, “How dare you do that. You’re going to hurt our kids.” Behind the scenes, the politics will go on heavily where you are lobbied very, very strongly.... This legislation stops that totally. What they are going to say is we have to do this. We don’t have a choice. Now, the person sitting on the outside that might have complained, might have come forward, might have said wait a minute that’s not fair, they can’t say it. It won’t make any difference.

The superintendent added, “It is not politically correct for them to say I don’t understand why those kids get to have a little bit lower pupil-teacher ratio than those kids. They can’t say that.”

Lack of autonomy. Mandated school reform elicits pressure on leadership to motivate staff to perform certain outcomes. Which leadership skills would be most successful in such circumstances is debatable; nevertheless, the influence of mandated reform on leadership skills is undeniably present as school leaders navigate the waters of NCLB. The influence on this particular school leader has been to expand the responsibility for accountability throughout the system. Superintendent Hill reported:

I have made sure that instead of just one or two people being held accountable for everything that is going on we have opened the door up to be able to say all of the principals are accountable and all of the teachers are accountable. In other words, we have had to spread accountability around quickly because previously it was easier for people to point a finger and say it is not our building or it is this or it is that. We are asking faculty members, building principals, and the Division of Educational Services to be more accountable.
Prompted by mandated accountability requirements, Superintendent Hill has described the need to expand the responsibility for the accountability requirements throughout the system. There is a clear hierarchical structure driving this distribution of accountability, as Superintendent Hill explained:

It trickles down. The Feds are asking the State, the State is asking the districts and school boards for this, the school board will ask the superintendent, and the superintendent will ask the division if it's a bigger school. For a smaller school, the superintendent will ask the principal, and the principal will ask the teachers.

The superintendent does not view his personal autonomy as diminished by NCLB. What is paramount to this superintendent is student learning. Recognizing there are things within his control and things that are not, Superintendent Hill summarized his feelings about the autonomy of leadership:

My autonomy, I don't see that as much of an issue. My responsibility is to provide the atmosphere or conditions to have accountability and more accountability than we had before. We need to hold people accountable for the inputs, and hopefully, the outputs will result. There are some things you can control and some things you can't. We are asking people to do the following things with kids. I hope that research based things with kids will turn it [student achievement] around.

As a mandated change, NCLB has provided a sense of urgency for leadership. Personal autonomy has taken a back seat to the need for change.

NCLB has opened the door for an assertive leadership style believed to be necessary to achieve unprecedented results. Authority granted through the leadership has provided support for the superintendent to initiate change quickly and without resistance. While leadership autonomy diminishes with legislative authority, the issue is a mute point for the superintendent who believes he is responsible for creating the conditions for accountability never experienced in public education. The authority granted through
NCLB supersedes the need for autonomy as the authority supports moving quickly to achieve increased student achievement results.

**Summary of Results: Upper Administration Study**

A congruence of interests exists between the Urban Community School District and NCLB. NCLB is believed to be a welcomed and necessary intrusion. From this congruence of interests has come a focus on a results-oriented approach to close the student achievement gap. Superintendent Hill realizes that for some students reaching a certain level of proficiency may be challenging, but he endorsed the goal of improvement for all low performing students. Information flow is described through a hierarchical structure heavily driven by the Iowa Department of Education. The role of the superintendent requires that he communicate with his staff and constituents about the details of NCLB. Keeping staff and the community informed is a complex task as the goal is to build confidence in the work of the school district.

The accountability of NCLB has influenced the leadership both internally and externally. Internally, the superintendent’s vision for the district has become data-driven. The level of accountability for results has caused Superintendent Hill to address building principal and staff morale. Affected by the accountability pressures, the leadership is working to assure results through teacher quality with an emphasis on evaluation and the Iowa Teaching Standards, communication and demonstration of high expectations for all students, and negotiating with the Association to diminish mobility within the district. Public accountability of NCLB has necessitated an increase in Superintendent Hill’s communication with the school board and the community. The superintendent is
countering negative perceptions through communicating the reality and the success stories within the district. Involving parents in the learning process is another area of priority for the superintendent. Attempts are being made to increase their involvement; however, a lack of parental involvement is not an acceptable excuse for poor student performance.

The superintendent reflects an assertive leadership style that is conducive to rapid change required of the NCLB external mandate. Authority granted through the legislation is providing an opportunity for unconventional changes to the system to increase student achievement results. With this legislative authority comes less autonomy, that is not an issue for this superintendent who believes he is responsible for creating the conditions necessary for accountability as never experienced before in public education. The legislative authority provides the necessary leverage.

Site Report: School A

Located on the east side of the community, the School A attendance center was built in 1953. Surrounding the parking lot and school campus is a chain-link fence, which one might assume is for safety purposes. However, no signs of graffiti or destruction of property is evident. Quite the contrary, the grounds appear to demonstrate a sense of pride in this place that houses the community’s children for over six hours a day. This same pride is reflected within the building’s walls.

Student artwork, inspirational banners, and posters on the walls speak to expectations for student learning. The environment would indicate a learning community and a culture of caring for the students this building serves. Therein lies the dichotomy;
School A is in its third year of being designated a school in need of assistance (SINA) for reading achievement as a result of not reaching its student achievement goals for 8th grade students as measured by the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS).

The ethnically heterogeneous student body is 69% minority students. Seventy-six percent of the K-12 students are eligible for free or reduced school meals as compared to fifty-five percent district wide. School A enrolls 453 students served by 45 teachers and 2 administrators. This provided the context for the two administrators interviewed in School A.

School A has two principals that share the responsibilities through a co-principalship. The leadership structure was a direct result of looking at the principalship differently for a building in need of assistance. Mrs. Sandra Miller is one member of this partnership. With her entire educational career spent at the Urban Community School District, Mrs. Miller began her career in various classified positions. In 1994, Sandra became a part-time teacher in a 4th/5th grade combination classroom. Her administrative career began in 1999 as a teacher/administrative assistant, and in 2000, she became a principal. Mrs. Miller has been principal at School A since 2001. Mr. Ronald Johnson completes the partnership. For over seventeen years, Mr. Johnson has been in the Urban Community School District. He is not a native to Iowa, but he chose to remain in the Iowa following college. Ronald’s intent was to pursue an educational career in an urban school district. While his entire educational career has been in this system, he has served in a variety of the secondary attendance centers. He has served as classroom teacher, assistant principal, athletic director, and since 2001, Mr. Johnson has been a building
principal at School A. Both Ms. Miller and Mr. Johnson hold a master’s degree in educational administration. They are involved in various committees at the building and district level such as the building leadership team, School A Site Council, and the Parental Involvement Committee. Both are involved in the community through their respective church organizations.

Findings

The findings from School A are organized around the three interactive patterns of contemporary agency theory: conflicting goals and objectives, asymmetry of information, and control and monitoring. Within the three interactive patterns, the following themes emerged: congruence of interests, the influence of informational flow on leadership, the influence of internal accountability on leadership, and the influence of public accountability on leadership. Although not part of the conceptual framework, the additional category of leadership was added to the core categories to be inclusive of those data that articulated the conceptual understandings of leadership.

Conflicting Goals and Objectives

Contemporary agency theory suggests that if the agent’s interests are in conflict with the goals and objectives of the principal, the issue of conflicting goals and objectives is problematic for the principal. The first research question describes this possible interaction: How does the school leadership negotiate the interests of NCLB and the local school building? Several interesting themes were evidenced in the administrator’s responses.
Congruence of Interests

With the designation of school in need of assistance, one might assume that the reaction of those involved would be to resist the mandate and its sanctions. That was not the case with these leaders. Administrators reported that the requirements of the legislation aligned consistently with the building’s interests. They spoke of four areas of congruence between the NCLB interests and the interests of their school building: 1) the welcome intrusion of the legislation; 2) a focus on the student achievement gap; 3) the support for a results-oriented approach, and 4) the challenge to reach proficiency.

The welcome intrusion. These administrators have a clear understanding that the legislation is indeed an intrusion into their work lives and presents unique challenges for public education. To a certain degree, this is a welcomed intrusion. While the timelines and expectations for student achievement appear to be the greatest challenges of the legislation, the administrators view the NCLB legislation as necessary and assistive in responding to the needs of their students. Principal Johnson explained:

It has been a necessary intrusion. Wearing a nametag is a pain. Locking doors is a pain, but it’s necessary. Teachers have picked up additional training they would not have received. So, it has been a necessary intrusion. I think it’s helped.

There appears to be agreement among the administrators that NCLB is providing needed assistance as Principal Miller stated:

I think the only thing NCLB did was put a little fire under our butts. Not changing what makes a good school, not changing the concept of what makes a good school, but tightening up the rope to make sure we’re doing those things to make a good school.

This “tightening of the rope” extends to how student achievement is perceived and what might need to be considered differently if all students are to be proficient.
The administrators believed that this congruence of interests opened doors to meet the needs of students: “The children that were being left behind in our schools would not be receiving the focus they’re receiving. Without NCLB, there would be no legislation to address them. It really has opened the door to do some things differently” (Principal Ronald Johnson).

Providing the catalyst for change, a motivator to move quickly, or an opportunity to re-examine how student learning is evaluated, the message is clear. NCLB and the SINA designation provide a welcomed intrusion that is igniting a fire for closing the achievement gap in this building.

Focus on the student achievement gap. NCLB addresses a group of children that have typically been unsuccessful in schools, and while this lack of student progress is not a new phenomenon, the legislation has provided an opportunity to focus on the achievement gap. Principal Ronald Johnson explained:

The gap has always been here. But, I think the legislation has made us more aware of that gap and particularly with the identification of specific subgroups. Having to identify the differences based on different subgroups means that we have got to make some changes within the subgroups. The overall outcome is that we are working on closing that gap.

Tragically, this achievement gap has been evidenced for some time in this building. While the achievement gap has been a constant, how the gap is addressed has shifted into high gear. A sense of urgency was reported by Principal Johnson:

This isn’t necessarily a new step, especially for this particular school and these students. The numbers go back year after year after year. This is the most aggressive in my years in the district that I have seen it [the district] attack these issues. Over the last two years, this is the most attention, energy, and financing that I’ve seen focused on a building that has significant issues. We talk about the achievement gap all the time. If it were not for this legislation, I don’t believe we
would be putting the energy into these students who have been overlooked. A priority that was on the back burner is now full boil on the front.

Principal Miller agreed with her colleague:

NCLB's focus is more on the small groups of kids, the data, and making certain that kids are at a certain level. The awareness is there now. It's not enough just to be learning, but you must be learning to a certain degree of proficiency.

This aggressive response and sense of urgency to close the achievement gap has resulted in a school-wide effort to achieve different results. In this school-wide effort, teachers and administrators are working together to erase a history of poor student performance.

**Support for a results oriented approach.** Staff members and the administration believe that many good things are happening in this building. Accompanying that belief, the staff and the administration described disappointment that their students are not reaching the required level of proficiency as measured by ITBS. According to Principal Johnson, “They [staff] were disappointed, but I don’t think the reception was crazy. They were disappointed that we weren’t able to impact that test. They have so many other measures of improvement. It’s unfortunate that we can’t make it show on that test is the attitude.” Coupled with the disappointment is empathy for staff members. Principal Miller explains:

I know people have so much evidence that the kids are learning. What it's doing to me is making me focus so much more on how can I impact those tests [ITBS]? What's this data saying? What are we missing? What am I not doing? It shows over here, but it doesn't show over here where people are looking and where it counts.

The disappointment and the lack of student achievement put pressure upon the system to find a solution and demonstrate results.
One solution being considered is the use and protection of instructional time to increase student achievement. Historically, the seven-hour school day has been flexible to accommodate activities designed to enhance student learning. When the school was designated SINA, the administrators carefully examined all activities to determine their impact on student achievement. Those learning activities not directly tied to improving student achievement were pushed aside. Principal Johnson reported:

It allows us to help teachers and parents understand that the time on task is critical…. We have gotten pushed. If you are behind, you will go faster to catch up, or you can make better use of your time. If you’re behind, you probably cannot go faster. If you had the academic skills to go faster, you wouldn’t be behind. So, we have to make better use of our content time. We’re rearranging schedules and those things we focus on.

With NCLB as support, these administrators are contemplating changes that will affect their entire school district. Nothing is sacred, and everything is up for discussion.

Principal Johnson summarized the possibilities:

Now, we’ve literally broadened our options. We can go in and say, “We have got to get rid of homeroom.” We’re looking at the possibility of a continuous calendar. In order to do that you have got to address extra-curricular activities. Do you have sports? Normally, that is suicide. Now, I can say, “Is this the best use of our time?” You wouldn’t bring it up without NCLB. We’ll see some of the good things that NCLB will allow after the dust settles because of some of the bad parts of it [NCLB].

The school leaders believe that seeking results so quickly requires a leaner educational system focused on results. There may be some unintended consequences given the rapid pace of necessary change.

The school leaders expressed the staff’s disappointment with student achievement results, the requirements of the legislation, and the timelines involved with the accountability. While empathetic to the teacher’s circumstances, there is a clear need for
the school leader’s to ensure improved student achievement results. The administrators see a congruence of interests between NCLB and their school’s interests in supporting a result-oriented approach.

Challenge to reach proficiency. As a building in its third year of being designated SINA, the reaction of the media and the community to the news that School A had been designation SINA again was more complacent.

Principal Johnson explained:

Last year a lot of the attention came to School A because we were one of the first schools at that level. So, we got a lot of spotlight. This year I don’t recall getting a request for an interview when the list came out. Other administrators are starting to understand that this thing is big, and in urban school districts, I think it’s going to be impossible for every building not to get on the list until we have long-range improvement.... It’s always going to be difficult. We have to do it with urgency, but also approach it for the long haul.... We knew as a district it was going to be more and more difficult year in year out for everybody not to be on the list.

Reaching proficiency is going to be difficult for many reasons, but as Principal Miller explained, caveats in this legislation can be particularly challenging:

I think some of the expectations and the timeframes have been challenging for us. In particular, I think many of our special needs students are identified because they need more time. To put them on the same timeframe for their growth as you would a student who may not have these particular needs is probably the greatest challenge.

Principal Johnson agreed:

We know we can move you a year in a year. We found that out last year with our grade level testing. So, if you come in where you’re supposed to, you should be able to leave where you are supposed to be. But, if you come in two years behind, you are going to leave two years behind, because we haven’t been able to move you one and a half years in one year. But, we could in one and a half years.... You don’t have any more days of school. You just keep breaking it into different chunks. There isn’t anything in place in regular schools that gives kids that need more time, more time.
With no more time available and with the requirement that all students reach the prescribed level of proficiency, challenges do exist. Yet, every day the administrators attempt to overcome these challenges and hold themselves to a level of accountability that far exceeds what might be consider reasonable. Principal Johnson described the self-induced pressure:

I can’t blame the teachers, and the teachers can’t blame the students, and whoever shows up at the front door, we had better teach them. If our best shot isn’t good enough, then we better get someone whose best shot is. That is a reality. We accepted that challenge, and without the legislation, we wouldn’t be feeling this way. It would be good to do, but you wouldn’t be expected to be moved or terminated if you didn’t get it done. Even though I think it should have always been that way.

With a clear sense of the challenges and the pressure to perform in such a situation, these administrators hold themselves responsible for the improvement of student achievement. In accepting the position of school principal, they accepted the role of instructional leader.

NCLB states that districts and/or school buildings must demonstrate adequate yearly progress in student achievement for reading and mathematics. A requirement of proficiency for all students and all subgroups for reading and mathematics presents a unique opportunity. With aggregate data, it is conceivable that the building’s student achievement may appear more positive than the reality for some students. The reported subgroups include; gender, race/ethnicity, English language learners, migrant students, students on individual education plans, and students on free and reduced lunch. Focusing on subgroups that might otherwise have been lost in the aggregated data is an advantage from these administrators’ perspectives. Principal Miller summarized this issue:
I think that it gives some real focus on the subgroups. It makes us focus now on smaller groups, not just your whole student achievement, not just your whole population, but looking at each group. How does that group learn? What does this group need? How are we identifying the strategies that work best with this group, and how are we able to move based upon what we know about a particular group. It makes us a little bit more refined in how we are identifying students.

While NCLB may be an intrusion, it is a welcomed intrusion for these administrators. There is a renewed focus on student achievement with a results-oriented approach driving the closure of the student achievement gap. The need to improve the learning experiences for students is unchallenged. Even with the caveats of this legislation's requirements, the administrators accept this challenge holding them accountable to achieve the desired results.

**Asymmetry of Information**

Contemporary agency theory suggests that inherent in the principal-agent relationship is the informational advantage for the agent as the principal does not have the necessary skills, resources, or information to achieve the desired outcomes. Exploring this interaction, the second research question was developed: How does the information flow of NCLB requirements influence the school leadership? From the response of the administrators, several interesting themes emerged.

**Influence of Information Flow on Leadership**

A hierarchy for the internal communication of information clearly exists in this district. Beginning with the superintendent and funneling through the assistant superintendents, School A administrators are informed of their progress in accordance with NCLB. Before information goes public, the staff is informed of the progress toward
its NCLB goals, but as Principal Johnson shared, “You have a sense of whether or not you did good. We’ve seen data coming in, and we know who’s here and what it would take to make a big jump.” Any information concerning test scores is shared with the administration before it is shared with the public. Principal Johnson explained the process:

Typically, we’ll have it [ITBS results] anywhere from 5-15 days, and we’ll just sit on it. It’s not public information until the board has received it. Then we’ll usually have a staff meeting and share the results. We tell them this is what we’ve got, and we always look for something positive.... We had success over here, and we need to work harder over here. The next day we’re back again picking up where we left off.

With a sense of what the data will show, both administrators felt a need to discuss with staff members the good, the bad, and the ugly of the SINA designation. School leaders believe supporting staff members is critical.

Understanding the disappointment among staff members, the principals recognized a need to communicate their feelings with one another - an opportunity to sit down with their team members, discuss their feelings together, and determine possible solutions. Principal Miller described the atmosphere during the sharing opportunities initiated to provide support for staff members:

They’re with me. We’re feeling the same things. We’re feeling frustration and we have sat down and had many conversations about different approaches and that we need to have a greater impact. How can we help these kids move past whatever it is that’s causing us not to show what they really know on that test?

The administrative leaders in School A are asking difficult questions and working collaboratively to seek solutions. While the leadership focuses on possible solutions to
poor test scores, they also provide support for teachers who are struggling to make sense of this information.

On an annual basis, the district publicly reports student achievement data to the Iowa Department of Education. This information is public knowledge, and ultimately, finds its way into the media's ranking of school buildings across the state. In addition to the public notification, the school building must inform parents if their building has been designated a school in need of assistance. Parents must be informed of school choice options and the available supplemental services. In order to allow parents adequate time to transfer their child to another building that is not designated SINA, the information must be reported to parents by August 15 of the current school.

Informing parents of their transfer options is necessary, but both principals reveal these contacts as opportunities to ask parents for support. Principal Miller described the dilemma:

We have to provide supplemental services, which means we're identifying students in certain areas. We have to strengthen what we're doing in terms of tutoring and other kinds of things. So, we're making contact with parents and saying, please back me.

Asking parents for support can be difficult. Principal Johnson elaborated, "We work real hard to try to restore people's dignity and remove obstacles, so everybody feels like it doesn't matter what I have or don't have. My kids have the opportunity for anything at that school."

Meeting the requirements of NCLB and contacting parents about the transfer options is only the first step. Knowing the benefits of having informed parents, additional efforts for ongoing communication have been established. This building is
trying various forms of communication. Principal Miller summarized their communication efforts:

We keep parents informed through our site council, newsletters, or whatever communication method we may have about smaller issues. We’re sending in our newsletters any information the district office sends to inform parents about state mandates. We have parents on our site council, and we’re constantly talking about NCLB. We’re probably not reaching them like we need to be for the most part.

Involving parents from the community may be challenging for a variety of reasons. Principal Johnson agreed with his colleague that parental involvement is minimal:

That is our biggest struggle getting them to come to site council. We’ve probably had five parents this year at site council, but not the same five at every meeting. I don’t think we’ve ever had more than two at a meeting who weren’t wearing at least some other hat. Some of our employees who have children here, that kind of thing.

Minimal parent involvement presents unique challenges for a building designated SINA. NCLB requires parental involvement and informing parents of the different services they might access for their child because of the sanctions. Despite efforts to improve parental involvement, both administrators would agree the results have not been satisfactory.

Information flow of NCLB has influenced leadership in School A by requiring a timely response to teacher and parent concerns. The administrators respond to their teachers’ reactions to the SINA designation with support and guidance for staff members struggling to articulate a rational for low student achievement. In essence, the administrators are extending the same guidance and support to parents as they keep them informed, ask for their support, and continue to invite them into the learning community.
Control and Monitoring

Contemporary agency theory holds that if the agent is forthcoming with accountability information, the principal is confident that the agent is working on his or her behalf. If the interests of the principal and agent are in conflict, the information asymmetry requires an accountability system that controls and monitors the agent’s behavior. The third research question examined this interaction: How does the public accountability system of NCLB influence the school leadership? The administrators’ responses suggest several themes.

Influence of Internal Accountability on Leadership.

The internal accountability inherent in NCLB has influenced the leadership of School A in several ways. First, the administrators’ vision for the school has become data-driven. Second, accountability has affected staff morale and forced administrators to attend to school climate. Third, NCLB has resulted in an increased importance of teacher evaluation for the administrators.

Data-driven vision. To monitor student achievement on a timely basis, there is a movement within the school district to be a results-driven system. Historically, the use of data was passively received as Principal Johnson stated, “We have been trying to conquer these battles way before NCLB. You’re going to look at the numbers at the end of the year, and the next year, you do what you do.” Principal Miller shared a similar story:

We always looked at data. We always had someone come in and address the staff and talk about where we were. It was just good information to have. It was just the information to help us compare where we were to the rest of the nation. It was just good information to know.
Now, the use of data is significantly different. The administrators’ vision for staff members is results-oriented. Knowing the data is insufficient. There must be a response to the data.

With NCLB, a response to the data that will improve student learning is a non-negotiable for these school leaders. Data are used to inform instruction and drive the building’s professional development plan. Databased decision-making is a district wide mantra. Principal Johnson described the impact of data on the decision making process for School A:

Now when we look at those numbers, we know that will determine who will be here and what we can and cannot do. Then we’ll usually have a staff meeting and share the results. These are the things that appear to be working, and because the item analysis is so detailed, we’re able to say, “We know in this building one of the things that’s really hurting us is inference, and they struggle drawing conclusions.” So, we’ll be working on that more this year.

Principal Miller also finds the ability to focus on influencing student achievement to be a result of the data-driven vision. For her, the focus has become a series of questions:

It has focused us more district wide. We have a strong focus on data and how we can look at what we’re doing and make some modifications make some alternations. How can we do better? How can we change those scores, change that image and concept that comes along with being a SINA?

These questions and changes in expectations for accountability have excited this leadership team. Motivated to achieve different student achievement results, the use of data has become a tool toward a data-driven system.

As Principal Miller explained, the strategic use of data has become a way to monitor student learning and has effected how she responds to student achievement results:
More so than anything, I think I’m thriving. Maybe because right now I’m so close to having those test scores back. It’s [the use of data] making me focused so much more on what we have to do to pass that test.... I know people have so much evidence that the kids are learning. What it’s doing to me is making me focus so much more on how can I impact those tests?

Sandra’s colleague, Principal Johnson agreed:

I love the data. NCLB has helped me. I’ve done a lot of it [use data], but I use it more now in making decisions. You know it has kind of confirmed some decisions I’ve made, but I also don’t want people to lose faith in their gut feeling.

Internally, the leadership has supported a data-driven vision for School A. Influenced by the accountability of NCLB and the designation of SINA, the leadership and staff are focused on the use of data to inform decisions with a sense of enthusiasm for the changes such decisions might bring.

Addressing staff morale. The administrators agree that staff morale has been influenced by the NCLB accountability requirements. While there exists an appreciation for teachers and their anxiety toward this legislation, there will be no excuses for not moving ahead with quality teaching practices, which are expected to lead to increases in student achievement. As Principal Johnson reported, the expectations are high:

Teachers traditionally haven’t had this kind of pressure before. Now, we’re telling people it’s not that way anymore. It’s going to be competitive. You have to produce, and if it appears that you’re the stumbling block or the cause, we can’t cover for you anymore. We can’t carry you anymore. If you can’t do it, then you need to move on. If you can do it, then you need to start doing it. And the same is true for administrators.

The expectations are high; however, when seeking unprecedented results, business as usual lacks credibility. The administrators themselves sense a new “pressure” as Principal Ronald Johnson explained:

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It’s almost like you’re in sports, and you’re the coach. If your team doesn’t start winning, then you don’t get to be the coach anymore. That’s a different kind of pressure. Before, if it didn’t blow up or nobody got shot, you might be able to ride out to retirement. We understand that we’re expected to produce results, real results. Students must read, write, and compute better. It needs to be measurable, and we need to be able to do it consistently with an increase every year. There’s no if, ands, or buts about it. If we can’t get it done, or we can’t do it but it’s doable, we should expect somebody else to come in and do it. It is doable. It’s done in other schools. So, that’s a different kind of pressure.

Such pressure influences the climate of the building. The administrators have to balance a caring community with a results-oriented approach:

We’re pushing, but at the same time trying to encourage and keep morale up. It does get difficult with 180 days of school and always hearing your scores are low. We’ve got to do this. We’ve got to, got to, got to. There’s only so far you can push before you have to come up for air (Principal Ronald Johnson).

In an effort to support people when they “come up for air”, nurturing people’s souls in hopes of keeping them part of the vision these administrators have for student learning becomes part of the plan. Principal Miller described the building’s efforts to cultivate a caring community while emphasizing results:

I try to focus a lot on the climate and culture of the building. I need people feeling good about being here because this is a good place to be, and they like coming here. I need people to feel comfortable with their work responsibilities and their peers. I want them feeling like they’re part of a team with some common goals and a common focus. I try to just keep everyone on board as team members and feeling like this has got to be all of us. I would say we a have pretty clear focus.

The response to the SINA designation from the central administration and the school leaders is collaborative: “We’re working more as a team not central administration versus School A. It’s central administration supporting School A and their change efforts.” While working collaboratively to find solutions to their challenges, both central
administration and building level leaders share a willingness to move into the unknown seeking different results.

The only way the administrators believe their building will see change is to work collaboratively to achieve the desired results. Emerging from these comments was support for NCLB and its influence on the administrative team from Principal Johnson, “I think that [NCLB] has helped us work more as a team, administration and staff, as opposed to being adversarial. We’re able to go in and say that we’ve got to start doing this, and there is not a whole lot of time.”

Assuring teacher quality. Resonating with the leadership of this building is the importance of quality teachers in the classrooms. While many factors influence student learning, it is ultimately “a teacher’s responsibility to know how students learn, to have resources and investigate different learning styles, and to differentiate instruction” (Principal Sandra Miller). Monitoring teacher quality has led to a renewed interest in teacher evaluation. The accountability requirements of NCLB have emphasized the importance of teacher evaluations for these administrators.

The Iowa Teaching Standards present clear criteria around eight different standards (Appendix B). As Principal Johnson reported, the ITS provide guidance:

I can say you’ve got a lot of good things going on, but in these areas, you’re not getting it. You can point right to it and be more specific, and they understand if this check mark is here next year then something different has to happen for you…. This current evaluation system is a lot more paperwork, but the discussions after observations are a lot more fruitful.

Principal Miller shared her philosophy:

My own philosophy is that we have to deal with the time that we have them [students]. It would be ideal to have these things going on outside of school that

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are great supports for kids. We don’t have an impact on that. We have an impact on the time that we have them with us.

These administrators take the need for quality educators very seriously. The ITS provide a guide for administrators with clear criteria that defines quality teaching. NCLB supports questioning teaching practices to assure quality teachers in every classroom.

Principal Johnson stated:

I’ve had teachers say well we do such and such in this building, and I don’t know if I want to stay. Well, that’s fine. I can appreciate that, and I can respect that. But, this is our style of offense, and if it’s a passing game and you’re a running back and don’t catch well, then you need to get to a team that just runs the ball. It comes out that way sometimes. So, you know it, and I know it. Before, it was very, very difficult to do that.

For these school leaders, NCLB and the ITS provide support for questioning past practices with an understanding that quality educators are the greatest resource to improving student learning. While used as a process to discuss teacher performance, all teachers in the state of Iowa will be accountable for the Iowa Teaching Standards in July 2005.

Often the most accomplished teachers are with the most accomplished students. The pressures and expectations for teachers who work with the least able students must be considered. Principal Johnson indicated their hope is to align the most talented teachers with the neediest students: “There has been some talk about working with the unions around contractual issues. Typically, the most qualified people are not in the buildings with the highest need.” These school leaders are challenging the current standards for teacher placement as Principal Johnson explained:

Every time there is an opening, you just can’t keep going out and hiring, you need to look at who gets to go where. We should consider looking at other teachers in
other buildings whose experience would be beneficial and say we want them here. Somebody that is here might be more successful some place else as opposed to the strict seniority concept that we have. That battle has started with helping the union to understand that too. Some teachers are better in other buildings.

In accordance with the best fit between teachers and students must be high expectations for every student. Both principals question the legitimacy of some teachers’ expectations for their students.

Indicating there might be some unintended consequences of teachers trying to be helpful and suggesting that high expectations for student learning are necessary, Principal Johnson explained how good intentions may be providing less opportunity:

We have people who believe that a poor child with a single parent and black skin maybe can’t achieve. So, if you can give them a warm breakfast, a warm lunch, and a snack after school with a hug that will help them. And it does meet a level of need, but if you can convince that youngster they academically can, then that child will. I mean it’s wherever you set the bar. That’s how high you can jump.

His colleague, Sandra Miller, would agree:

Often times we make excuses for kids who are of a certain group, and we lower our expectations because we’ve made those excuses for them. But to me they are just that. They are excuses. We still have the same expectations for every, single child that walks through this door regardless of what they have on, what color their skin is, or what kind of background they come from. We have the same expectation for them working to the best of their ability regardless of all those other things.

High expectations for all students with no differentiation for background, skin color, or socio-economic status are non-negotiable for the administrators. If all students are to meet the prescribed level of proficiency, there must be unilateral expectations.

To assure a quality-learning environment with high expectations for all students, NCLB and the Iowa Teaching Standards (ITS) have become a tool for support and evaluation of teacher performance. Assuring quality teachers, administrators are adamant
about quality educators with high expectations who are teaching those students who best match their skills and expertise; they do not tolerate any excuses.

The accountability requirement of NCLB have affected the internal organizational of School A. The vision of administrative leaders in this school has become data-driven, increased their attention to the school climate, and elevated the importance of teacher evaluation. The moral of staff members is important to these administrators, and in these challenging times, special attention is being given to the climate of their building. Responding to the “new type of pressure”, the leadership has worked collaboratively to attain their desired outcomes. They have responded as a team to achieve unprecedented results.

Influence of Public Accountability on Leadership

While internal accountability for NCLB influences the leadership in Site A, the public response to the SINA designation has also affected the administrators in several ways. While public accountability is viewed as a positive component of NCLB, there is a sense of “Big Brother” as Principal Miller reported:

It keeps you on your toes because you always know that everything you do and say you are kind of in a glass. So, you’re careful about how things are happening, how you’re approaching because you are always out front, always being analyzed and baby-sat.

Believing the public is scrutinizing every move; the administrators must continue to move aggressively forward to meet the needs of their students and the demands of their public.

Combating a negative public perception. The NCLB public accountability measures have influenced the leadership of School A in two ways. The principals must
combat a negative public perception and must institute various methods to increase parent awareness and involvement.

Inherent in the acceptance of NCLB challenges is the designation of being a "bad" school. This community perceives the SINA designation as one more indication that living on this side of town is less desirable:

Before the numbers went out, even ten years ago, there was a negative perception of this school. People have some perceptions about the grocery store, the bank, and the parking lots. I think people even wonder if the weather over here is as good as the weather somewhere else. School A is caught up in that perception. It was viewed as the quote “black school” even if another middle school had more black students. So, that’s been the hard part. Take that perception that’s been out there for a long time, toss in the data that people now have access to and we can’t pretend our numbers aren’t that bad. We’re not that far behind somebody else. Now, you can’t say that it’s not bad. How bad is it? Bad. How bad is bad? Seventy percent are non-proficient (Principal Johnson).

This public perception has affected students, parents, and teachers. Principal Johnson explained a consequence of this designation:

We have a small group who don’t want to be here, and they don’t want their kids to be here. I understand you would love for your child to not have to come home and feel like every time we look in the paper they say my school is no good. That’s tough on parents. That’s tough on the students. You know it’s hard to get psyched up after that.

The SINA designation was challenging for staff at School A, who realized the close public scrutiny of their educators’ work. Sandra Miller suggested that such intimacy can influence staff motivation, “We can prove on other assessments that kids are learning, but in this glass, we’re viewed from the outside. I think it gets hard for us being in that glass to stay focused and to stay positive about what’s happening.”

Fighting negative public perception is a consequence of being designated a SINA. For these administrators, the public perception continues to worsen. The leaders must
overcome a history of negative public perception based on consistently poor student achievement results. Confronting the brutal reality of student achievement in School A, Principal Johnson stated, "It's the first time we have really had national report cards. You could've asked ten people five years ago to rank the schools, and School A still would have been four out of four." With such a history, the perception of the school leaders might be one of futility. Instead, these school leaders are aggressively seeking to change history by doing everything they can to show results. These administrators have turned to parents of their students as a one method to combat this negative perception and change the future for their school.

**Parental awareness and involvement.** One way the administrators have tried to combat the negative public perception is to increase parental involvement. The administrators acknowledge the student benefit of parental involvement and are instituting a variety of methods that might include more parents in the learning process. An issue for many parents is transportation. The idea of making the school more accessible to parents is one avenue being explored. This accessibility is tempered with sensitivity to their client's needs as Principal Johnson reported:

They're not going to say I don't have a way to get there. The bus will make fifteen stops and seven of those will be churches. We're just going to run the bus. You may not feel like driving. You don't even have to call. This is where it will be, and this is the time. I don't know if it will work, but we'll try it.

Hoping to enhance parental involvement through accessibility, the school leaders are providing transportation to eliminate at least one barrier to parents becoming involved in the child's education. While it may be perceived as a small gesture, for many parents in this community, transportation is an issue.
Principal Miller stressed maximizing in-school efforts to compensate for less-than-optimum support outside of school: “It would be ideal to have things going on outside of school to support kids, but we don’t have an impact on that. We have an impact on the time that we have them with us.” Principal Johnson agreed, “We like to expect them [parents] to do certain things, and if they do, they give their children some additional advantages. But if they don’t, I still have the same responsibility.” There are “no excuses” as Principal Johnson reported:

That’s the one thing we simply cannot control. The kids will be here whether their parents care, come to meetings, or get involved. My job is to do what I’m supposed to whether a parent shows up, has a phone or is homeless. I’ve got a responsibility to that child. So, that’s why I don’t push the parent part more than I do because I think there are people who just use that as an excuse.

The administrators are working diligently to respond to the public accountability. A negative public perception preceded the SINA designation. The data support and have added credibility to the perception that this part of the community and their school are failing. Support is needed to change this perception and the administrators have turned to their parents as allies in this challenge. While inviting parental involvement, the administrators will continue their work with or without parental support.

**Leadership**

Independent of contemporary agency theory, leadership emerged as an independent theme. Within that theme, the following subcategories emerged: assertive leadership, authority granted leadership, and lack of autonomy.
Leadership Style

NCLB has influenced a more assertive and authoritative style of leadership that is driven by the building's need to produce results quickly. Time for improvement is short, and many decisions are made unilaterally instead of by collaborative consensus building. Importantly, autonomous leadership is not necessary according to these administrators and, in fact, can be a deterrent to achieving results. NCLB has reduced the administrator's sense of autonomy and replaced it with an authority to assertively implement the necessary changes.

Assertive leadership. One response to the NCLB accountability might be to sit tight and keep a low profile. The leaders in this building see another response to increased accountability: take risks. NCLB accountability has provided an opportunity to take risks and move forward with a more assertive non-democratic leadership style as Principal Johnson explained:

We're behind, and we don't have time to discuss a lot of stuff. I think it has allowed us to be less democratic and provide more leadership. You don't always have time to feel inconsistent about what is correct. You must go forward, take some risks, and think out of the box.

One example of unilateral decision-making is the administration's requirements that all teachers provide reading instruction in their classrooms every day. School A was designated as not achieving acceptable levels of proficiency for reading, resulting in an increased "push" in that area. All teachers are now teachers of reading and have had to learn and implement a variety of reading strategies in their classrooms. According to Principal Johnson, "Right now, we are pushing reading. Every teacher in the building has had to learn some reading skills. It's expected that they do this with every subject,
every room, and every day. Something reading related must go on.” This initiative is new to the staff, and there has been some resentment. “Obviously if you’re a PE teacher, you don’t know how to teach reading, and they’re not always happy that some teachers are really excited.”

Yet, there is no time for discussion or disagreement. While the administrators understand the resistance to a new way of doing business, they are moving forward. Assertive, unilateral decisions provide the “fast track” to improvement. Principal Johnson stated, “I have to push to think out of that box and sometimes people say, ‘I disagree’, and I appreciate that, but we’re still going to do it.” A collaborative democratic process to guide school reform has been pushed aside by assertive, unilateral decision making by the administrators. Principal Miller agreed that she must assertively take risks to achieve results:

I’m a risk taker. I don’t know if NCLB put more of an emphasis on that or what. But, I know that something different has to happen for different results, and I know we have to have different results. So, maybe just the pressure of knowing that we have to move beyond where we are with the testing and what’s happening with our kids has forced us to think even further out of the tradition than we normally would. I’m of the “whatever works” nature. I don’t care if it’s something that some have done before. I don’t care about precedent being set. Those are the kinds of things that we pretend to focus on. I just want to know they [strategies] work. That it works for this population.

Change in student achievement will require a new way of thinking. Different results are required. To create such a change, the administrators believed a more assertive, non-democratic style of leadership might be necessary.

Authority granted leadership. Authority to make necessary changes has been granted to school leaders through NCLB’s requirement that all students be proficient.
The administrators now have the authority to make the needed changes. Principal Ronald Johnson speaks to the authority granted leadership through NCLB:

For the schools that have been considered successful, I know they don’t like it [NCLB] because it turns attention on them when they’re doing a decent job. But for the schools that have been struggling, we would not have been able to take from the rich without this legislation. There are some people who said off the record that it needed to be done for a long time, but in their positions in the school district, they couldn’t do it. They couldn’t get the political support. Even though people have known that it needs to be done, it took this [NCLB] to get that kind of support.

The NCLB legislation provided school leaders with the “ammunition” they needed to effect change. The federal requirements granted the administrators the authority to request political and financial support for reform initiatives. Principal Johnson continues:

How do you go to your board and say this school is terrible. We have to do this, this, and this. They don’t understand that. Politically, it’s just hard to do some things, and not only hard, it may be impossible. You need 4 out of 7 votes to do certain things, and the things that are most difficult you want 5 out of 7. For the really difficult, you need 7 out of 7. NCLB gave you that 6th and 7th vote. They had to do it. It’s the law.... Administrators have known all along. It’s just the political climate doesn’t allow you to do it.

In essence, this legislation supports the leadership in providing the services for the students that have been waiting. NCLB granted the administrators the authority to prioritize certain efforts to improve student achievement. The administrators have federal support to make changes they perceive as necessary. Principal Johnson summarized the granted authority, “We can do things faster.... It [NCLB] has really caused and allowed us to drive what’s supposed to be driven anyway.”

Lack of autonomy. However, with this unilateral, legislative authority comes a loss of autonomy. Rather than selecting initiatives of their own volition, administrators must accept the priorities of NCLB. For these administrators, the tradeoff is well worth

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the benefits for their students. As Principal Johnson stated, "If it weren't for NCLB, I
don't believe we would have gotten the resources here.... It has taken some [autonomy]
away. Honestly, I don't think there should be total autonomy." Total autonomy
contradicts the district-wide curriculum standards and grading standards that are expected
to be implemented throughout the system. According to Principal Johnson the autonomy
is not expected:

We have a district curriculum that they [teachers] are expected to follow, and we
don't give it to all of the students. There is standardized grading to a certain
extent. You can't say here are the pieces arrange them the way you want to.
When they get to ninth grade, I shouldn't be able to tell which kid came from
which school...Right now, we still can.

Externally driven, NCLB challenges the autonomy of the building level leader.

These administrators do not believe relinquishing control is a difficulty. As Principal
Miller reported, NCLB has set the parameters to guide her work:

The legislation has established some goals for us. In order to reach those goals
here are some steps that we have to make whether or not we like all the steps.
Whether or not we are making all the right moves is another question, but in order
for us to get from here to here these are some things we know that have to happen.
This is just the way it's going to have to be based on where we need to go.

NCLB and the SINA designation have influenced the administrators' leadership
styles. They have chosen a more assertive response to accommodate the timelines and
requirements of the legislation. Decisions are being made quickly, and unilaterally, and
staff ownership is seen as a luxury in this process. Authority granted through the
legislation is permitting leadership to respond aggressively in demanding political and
financial support for reform initiatives. However, using the authority granted leadership
through NCLB is a trade-off. Autonomy must be relinquished. Administrators in School
A do not believe this is a penalty, and in fact, they would accept a loss of autonomy for gains in student achievement.

Summary of Results: School A

A congruence of interests between the administrators and the requirements of NCLB exists at School A. Administrators report that the requirements of NCLB aligned consistently with the building’s interests. Generally perceived to be an intrusion in the educational community, NCLB is a welcomed intrusion that has facilitated actions considered needed in the school. A renewed interest and urgency in narrowing the student achievement gap has shifted into high gear. The administrators described a school-wide focus on results, and a results-oriented approach congruent with the goals of NCLB. These administrators have focused their attention on the challenge of reaching prescribed proficiency levels for all students. Despite demanding timelines and significant student needs, these administrators have accepted the challenge of proficiency for all students and hold themselves accountable for student achievement.

The information flow accompanying NCLB has influenced school leadership in two ways. An organizational hierarchy exists which defines the flow of information. The test results go from the superintendent to building administrators, to staff, and finally, to the public. Within this flow, administrators first expressed a heightened sense of support for staff members who are struggling with the SINA designation. Attention was given to the culture of the building and to the success the staff and administrators have achieved collaboratively. Second, administrators reported the need to increase ongoing communication with parents and the community once the SINA designation was
made public. Parents were courted for support with regular and frequent communication. However, the administrators recognized they are not reaching all parents. Belief in the benefits of an informed parent population and the parental involvement requirements of NCLB prompted the administrators to seek out new ways to communicate regularly with parents that are not being reached.

The internal accountability inherent in NCLB has prompted the leadership’s vision to become data-driven. Data are used to inform instruction and drive the building’s professional development. Unprecedented accountability has motivated the administrators to focus on school climate and work collaboratively to achieve their goals. Both administrators described a need to support teachers feeling pressured while still emphasizing results. Teacher evaluation has increased in its importance to assure quality educators in every classroom. The principals stressed the important of “all” teachers having high expectations for “all” students. One goal is to align the most talented teachers with the “neediest” students.

The public accountability of NCLB has strengthened an already negative public perception of Site A. Attempting to reverse this trend has become a focus for the administrators. Increased parental involvement is one strategy administrators believe will alter this negative public perception.

Influenced by NCLB and the SINA designation, the leadership styles of the administrators have become assertive to meet the short timelines and high stakes requirements. Both administrators reported unilateral decisions and a “less-democratic” style of leadership. Authority granted through the NCLB legislation prompted the
administration to move forward with change initiatives that both administrators believed needed to be accomplished, but lacked political and financial support. NCLB granted the leaders the authority to prioritize certain efforts to improve student achievement. The federal requirements lessened the resistance to such changes. Yet, accessing the granted authority has called for limitations on the autonomous role of the principal. The administrators accept the priorities of NCLB. This lack of autonomy is not viewed as a negative but a positive in accomplishing the necessary work to increase student achievement.

**Site Report: School B**

Opened in 1972 as a high school building, School B is located on the outskirts of the community. With declining enrollments and the reorganization of the district facilities, School B began serving middle school students in 1988. One indicator that this building was designed for high school students is a large sports complex that is not typically seen at a middle school. A large parking lot that sits comparatively empty with the exception of vehicles driven by staff members is another indicator of this building’s former life. A large commons area at the entry of the school building appears empty and sterile. For students arriving from the elementary level, its size could seem overwhelming.

Serving 800 students in grades sixth through eighth, School B has the largest student population of any middle school within the district. Due to the location and the size of the building, there is a sense of detachment of this facility from the community. The student body evidences the detachment: “We have 800 kids, and that’s a lot of kids.
We have close to 600 kids being bused in here” (Principal Richard Smith). Sixty-four teachers and four administrators serve these 800 students. The ethnically heterogeneous study body is 35% minority students. Sixty-one percent of the K-12 students are eligible for free or reduced school meals as compared to fifty-five percent district wide.

Hallways in the building display student artwork and inspirational posters that speak to student success. Several desks house clerical staff in the main office. Evidenced throughout the office are the tools to keep such a large school system running: schedules posted, keys on hooks, shelves of binders, a two-way radio receiver with a crackling sound that breaks any available silence, and a television that showcases eight different scenes of the school proceedings.

Not reaching their student achievement goals for 8th grade mathematics as measured by the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) and for a participation rate for district wide assessments that fell below the required 95%, School B is in its first year of being designated a school in need of assistance (SINA). For the school year, the building was designated for both mathematics and reading. The deficiencies provided the context for the four administrators interviewed from School B.

School B has one principal and three assistant principals. All of the interviewees hold a master’s degree with administrative certification, and each is heavily involved in committee work at the building and district level such as the Social Committee, Safety Committee, SINA Committee, the Black History Committee, and the Middle School Advisory Committee. In addition, several of the principals have served or are serving on state committees, such as the Governor’s Task Force for Closing the Achievement Gap,
and the Urban Education Network for Middle Schools. Leadership is also provided at the community level through church organizations, the Black Alliance, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored Persons, and the Boy Scouts.

The principal, Mr. Richard Smith, is a lifelong resident of the community with thirty-two years at Urban Community School District. With the exception of five years of teaching, Principal Smith has served in an administrative capacity in several of the middle school and high school attendance centers. The last five years have been spent at School B as the principal. Choosing to retire, this will be his last year in the school district.

Each of the three assistant principals is responsible for one particular grade level. Mr. Mathew Randall has served this school district for seventeen years. He has served as an assistant administrator for seven years in School B. As assistant principal, Mr. Randall is responsible for the 6th grade team and their work. His entire educational career has been in the Urban Community School District. Mrs. Mary Trent is the assistant principal responsible for the 7th grade team. Mary is also a lifelong member of the community and school district. She was a teacher for twelve years at the high school with a focus on social studies. She has been an assistant principal for four years serving School B. Mr. Brian Jones completes the administrative team. Mr. Jones has served the district for twelve years with eight years in the alternative education setting. He has been an assistant principal for three years. For the last two years, Brian has been at School B as an assistant principal responsible for the 8th grade team. He too has spent his entire educational career with the Urban Community School District.
Findings

The findings from School B are organized around the three interactive patterns of contemporary agency theory: conflicting goals and objectives, asymmetry of information, and control and monitoring. Within the three interactive patterns, the following themes emerged: congruence of interests, the influence of informational flow on leadership, the influence of internal accountability on leadership, and the influence of public accountability on leadership. Although not part of the conceptual framework, the additional category of leadership was added to the core categories to be inclusive of data that articulated the conceptual understandings of leadership.

Conflicting Goals and Objectives

If the agent's interests are in conflict with the goals or the objectives of the principal, the first issue of conflicting goals and objectives is evidenced as suggested by contemporary agency theory. The first research question addressed this interaction: How does the school leadership negotiate the interests of NCLB and the local school building?

Congruence of Interests

In its first year designated a school in need of assistance, there has been new attention given to "how well are our kids doing." For this building, there is a sense of urgency and awareness of the penalties associated with being a SINA as Principal Smith reported:

This whole accountability, we have to do it because we know the state penalties. We have to get some data that says our kids are learning. That is the important thing with the community. We have to get some kind of validation across the board. We have to look at our school right now. We have to be concerned about School B.
The interviewees spoke of four areas of congruence between the building's interests and those of the state and federal government: 1) the welcomed intrusion of the legislation, 2) a focus on the student achievement gap, 3) the support for a results-oriented approach, and 4) the challenge to reach proficiency.

**The welcomed intrusion.** For the administrative team, definite concerns accompany this legislation and the SINA designation. The administrators view NCLB as forcing a change in attitude and increasing awareness around student achievement results:

I might not like it, but its put more of a focus on our job to teach kids and to help them learn to do their best. In the old days, you might have said, “If a kid doesn’t want to learn that’s just too bad. You know you are not going to learn. Just don’t take anybody down with you, okay?” It has made us simply say, “Hey, those attitudes, well kiss them goodbye” (Principal Smith).

Assistant Principal Jones described how NCLB increased awareness and a focus on results:

There’s just more focus on the numbers... What did that kid score in reading? What level are they at? We’re asking these questions all the time now. I think that’s good that we’re more aware. It certainly doesn’t harm the educational process. So, I don’t personally have any problem with that.

Although challenged by the provisions, these administrators agree this is a welcomed and necessary intrusion. Focusing educators’ attention on the student achievement gap is believed to be a benefit.

**Focus on the student achievement gap.** One could argue that the impetus for NCLB was the decline in student achievement, especially among certain segments of the population. This inequity has caused many to wonder why some students achieve while others do not. Assistant Principal Mary Trent reported:
We definitely have an achievement gap, and people are trying desperately to figure out how do we address the achievement gap, and what is causing the achievement gap. I’m not sure there is any one given answer to why we have an achievement gap.

Assistant Principal Jones described one possible scenario:

I think kids fall through the cracks. I think they do. If they’re not a discipline problem and they don’t get noticed, you might hear, “Oh, this is such a nice kid. We’ll just go ahead and pass them on.” Then we get kids that don’t have what they need.

As Principal Smith stated, “There is certainly public concern about how well our kids are doing. The public, state, and federal governments are opening up our eyes in terms of the various sub-groups of students in our building and how well they are performing on ITBS.” The lack of student achievement in the various sub-groups is not a new phenomenon. While the administrators offered various reasons for the achievement gap, there was consensus that the achievement gap has existed in this district for a long time.

Meeting the needs of all learners is a concern at School B. Administrators are interested in addressing the needs of struggling, average, and high achieving students. These leaders are concerned that resources allocated to meet the needs of the struggling student may limit available resources for the average or high achieving students. With such a diverse academic population and limited resources, they suggest it will be difficult to keep everyone moving ahead while closing the achievement gap. Assistant Principal Randall elaborated:

In this particular district, we have been trying to focus on the achievement gap for a number of years. And there has been some progress made. The thing that this district has also been aware of is that we not take away from the students that are achieving and bring them down. So, we try to keep the students that are achieving motivated.... But by the same token, in the eyes of the public, how are we closing the gap if the rich are still getting richer from an academic perspective.
To be honest with you, without being discriminatory, you must allow the students at the top the opportunity that you are presenting at the middle and the bottom. You have to present opportunities to motivate them to continue to strive for achievement too. So, it's a difficult concept for some people to grasp because we're looking at the gap not ever getting closer if we continue to let the students who are achieving to go higher and higher.

Closing the student achievement gap while meeting the needs of all students is the challenge for these administrators. At this time, their response to closing the achievement gap is to bring a renewed focus on student achievement results with an interest in certain groups of students that might have been lost in the aggregate picture of student performance.

**Support for a results-oriented approach.** NCLB provides a focus on student achievement results, particularly on those groups of students that have lagged behind: the minority students, students with individual education plans, migrant students, and English language learners. The School B administrators believe that NCLB and the designation of school in need of assistance have not greatly altered their work but have provided a renewed focus on results and a sense of direction for the system.

Woven throughout the conversations with the interviewees is the word “focus”.

Articulating a results-oriented approach, NCLB and the SINA designation are recognized by the administrators for their positive contributions. Assistant Principal Mary Trent reported:

One of the things NCLB has done, and it has been done well is an increased awareness of what we are truly doing. We may have been doing things, but did we have a name for it? Could we do them better? What else was out there? That is a positive aspect of NCLB. It did increase our awareness of what we were doing and how we were doing it.
The opportunity to endorse a results-oriented approach has created a vision of consistency among the school leadership. As Principal Trent explained, “It [NCLB] really made a difference in terms of helping all of us to understand the whole process better and to follow through collectively with what everybody should be doing at a given point in time.”

Administrators in this building are meeting the requirements of the legislation head on. With conviction, Principal Smith stated:

We can knock NCLB and say it’s a bad law. But, the bottom line is our kids. There’s no running away from what we’re going to do…. The old days of doing your own thing and teaching what you want is going to come to an end. Now, there’s some accountability. It’s up to our good leadership team to see that we are moving forward with our student achievement.

For these school leaders, “moving forward” manifests itself through alignment of interests and a clear focus on results, laced with a need to move quickly.

Focusing on results, the administrators have carefully examined instructional time for reading and mathematics and altered students’ schedules to maximize learning. If the instructional time does not directly contribute to student achievement in reading and mathematics, the activities are considered expendable. Assistant Administrator Trent explained that difficult decisions are being made:

I think the immediacy of it [SINA designation] forces you to take some things away that you don’t want to take away. For example, in order to help increase reading scores, we have kids in this Fast Forward program. That pulls them out of one of their exploratories. You know for some kids those are the best things they have in the day. They like to go and work with tools in industrial tech or do things in family consumer science or work on the computers…or whatever the exploratory is. But, we’re taking these kids and saying, “No, we need to be doing Fast Forward because it’s going to increase your reading capabilities down the road.” That’s hard for kids.
Aligning their school’s interests with the requirements of NCLB has resulted in prioritizing instructional activities that will result in increased student achievement for low performing students. Understanding the need to show results, these school leaders see the congruence of their school’s interests with the requirements of NCLB. Assistant Principal Jones described the benefits of this congruence of interests concerning results:

There are mixed feelings, mixed emotions about NCLB. But if they’re raising the quality of education, if they’re raising the standards of what’s expected of teachers and how to present the information to students, it’s going to help students that are on the low end of achievement. I think it’s going to eventually affect those kids and help those kids on the high end. It’s going to improve education, which should help everyone. So, I don’t have a problem with that.

School B has a renewed focus on results and a sense of direction supported through NCLB and the SINA designation. The focus is on learning with improved results as an expectation for low performing students.

Challenge to reach proficiency. While a welcomed intrusion, NCLB provides unique challenges for leadership. Speaking to the challenges at School B, Assistant Principal Randall explained:

The most challenging part has been to try to figure out ways to get off this list to be honest with you. That’s been the biggest challenge. Part of it is keeping everybody working toward a common goal to try to raise test scores, to get more students off the retention list, to reduce our dropout rate, and to get more parents involved. That been the greatest challenge here for us.

Getting off the list might be the greatest challenge, but the time available in which to achieve the proficiency goal is quite short with compounding sanctions year after year. This shortness of time to reach proficiency has created a sense of urgency: “True change takes a long time to show, but we’re being held accountable right now. So, even if we implemented changes and were working to make things better that may not show up
immediately. Yet, we're being held accountable“ (Assistant Principal Trent). Assistant Principal Jones extended this sentiment, “We don’t always have the luxury of time to get those students where they have to be, and they have to make so much progress each year in order to keep ourselves in good standing. Sometimes, it might take a little longer than a year to get where we want to go.” Despite a tight timeline and a heightened need for accountability, these school leaders have accepted the challenge for all students to reach proficiency.

NCLB requires that all students reach a prescribed level of proficiency, including special education students. Explaining the challenge, Principal Smith reported:

It probably scares a lot of administrators. Why are we doing all of this? We know that we are never going to get some of the special needs students up to being proficient. We are always going to be on the watch. You have to accept that as a challenge. You want to do the best for the kids.

Recognizing the intrusive nature of the legislation, the leadership has welcomed the intrusion as a challenge to create learning experiences that meet the needs of low performing students. There is a renewed focus on student achievement with all learners expected to show results. There is support for a result-oriented approach, which is being pursued with a sense of urgency. While there may be concerns about achieving the goals of this legislation, congruence of interest between the requirements of the legislation and the building’s interest is supported by the administrative team.

Asymmetry of Information

As suggested by contemporary agency theory, the agent has an information advantage as the principal does not have the necessary skills, resources, or information to achieve the preferred outcomes. The second research question explains this interaction:
How does the information flow of the NCLB requirements influence the school leadership? Emerging from the responses of the participants were several interesting themes.

**Influences of Information Flow on Leadership**

In this building and the district, there is a hierarchy for the distribution of information. While the apex for funneling information may be the Iowa Department of Education, the flow of information is predicated on positional power. In this building, the principal relays information to the assistant principals. The news of School B receiving the designation of school in need of assistance was shared with the administrative team before it was shared with the faculty or made public. Assistant Principal Trent recalled, “I don’t really remember exactly who all was there. I know he [the principal] spoke to all three of us...The administrators knew, and then he [the principal] gave the information to the rest of the faculty.”

The information flow affected the school administrators in two ways. First, there was a need to support their teachers as this information became public. Second, the flow of information required the administrators to access a variety of communication venues to address one of their primary stakeholders, the parents.

After the administrators were made aware of the situation and understood that the information would soon be part of the public domain, the teachers were the next audience. Understandably, these conversations were difficult. As Assistant Principal Randall explained:

> My teachers were on a slight emotional high when we first broke the news to them that we did make some progress.... We might have fallen a percent or two
below where we needed to be in a couple of areas, and that will keep us on this
list. I couldn’t believe my teachers’ anxiety to be honest with you. I thanked
them first for all the hard work and the effort and our continued collaboration. I
didn’t promise them anything in reference to final results because that has to
come from State. We’re hoping that we’ll maybe get some relief from the tension
and stress that some of my teachers are feeling. They are beginning to wonder if
that means them personally or not in terms of their methods or teaching
techniques.

Assistant Principal Trent addressed the fundamental issue: “You know it’s deep down.
You don’t want to be thought of as a bad teacher, and sometimes when your school is
named that way teachers will get blamed or the leaders of the school get blamed.” The
administrators empathized with their teachers.

Once the information flowed to the teachers, the administrators recognized the
need to provide support to the staff. The administrators decided to step forward. As
Assistant Principal Randal reported:

A collaborative process is essential…. We have to see what’s working and what’s
being implemented that appears to work for our clientele. The success stories that
we are able to accomplish need to be shared among the different teams and the
different grade levels so that teachers get some ideas on what may be useful to the
clientele that we serve.

Working collaboratively, the administrators hoped that the burden of reaching
proficiency would be distributed among leadership and staff. The administrators are well
aware that they have a critical role to play in communicating the message of success and
support for the teachers.

The information flow of the NCLB legislation also influenced the administrators’
decisions concerning parental involvement. Since being designated SINA, the leadership
made deliberate attempts to communicate and educate the parents to de-emphasize the
stigma. Principal Smith reported:
Some of my parents when the first found out, especially some of the incoming ones that came from Elementary School A where their kids performed pretty well, they thought, "Oh, wow, School B must be a bad place." Now that some of the parents have found out about NCLB, it's not that we're a bad school. It's just that there are certain groups of students that have some learning difficulties.

The principal has chosen to use a variety of communication venues and provides opportunities for the assistant principals to provide leadership in increasing parental awareness and involvement. Assistant Principal Jones explained the contributions of the administrative team in keeping parents and community members informed:

I think the best way it's been done is with some of the groups that meet; the site council, the Department of Education, primarily the principal. But, we all had a little part in presenting information and data to those groups. So, you get it to the community. You get it to parents, so they can take it to their neighbors. Now, School B is not such a bad place, but this is why they're on the list.... Just open the lines of communication and let people know what's going on at all times.

Another venue for communication has been their site council as Principal Smith explained:

We're very fortunate here at School B. We have a large site council. Most of the time, we have around 20 parents that show up. I go out of my way to make sure they are comfortable.... They just want to make sure their kids don't get left behind in the whole picture. What we are saying is whatever strategies we come up with are not going to be for the kids that need to improve but for all kids. That's the focus too that kids are not being left out. Where we are heading is certainly important to the public.

The administrative team is working together to keep parents informed and confident in their teachers, administrators, and the quality of their child's learning experience.

The information flow of NCLB has influenced the leadership in School B. The administrators are aware and responding to the needs of their internal staff. With empathy and support, they are helping staff members to negotiate the information of NCLB and the SINA designation. The same efforts to help parents and community
members understand the SINA designation have been initiated. The administrative team has accessed a variety of communication venues to increase staff and community awareness of the unique challenges of NCLB and being a school in need of assistance.

**Control and Monitoring**

If the interests of the principal and agent are in conflict, this information asymmetry requires an accountability system that controls and monitors the agent's behavior. Contemporary agency theory would suggest that if the agent is forthcoming with accountability information, the principal is confident of progress toward the desired outcomes. The third research question was developed to explain this interaction: How does the public accountability system of NCLB influence the school leadership?

**Influence of Internal Accountability on Leadership**

In response to the SINA designation, the collection and analysis of data have become a critical element in the day-to-day lives of these educators. It is through their data that school leadership can monitor and influence the areas of student achievement, assessment participation, graduation rates, and attendance rates within their system. The accountability requirements of NCLB have influenced the leadership of School B in three ways. First, the administrative vision has become data-driven. Second, administrators are faced with addressing staff morale. Third, the administrators are addressing teacher quality through the evaluation process.

**Data-driven vision.** Traditionally, assessments have been given at the district level with little accountability tied to the results. That has all changed. The data requirements of NCLB have motivated these administrators to use assessment data more
effectively. As the focus on data-driven decision making takes a front seat, the leaders are focused on numbers. Assistant Principal Jones explained further:

You used to get your ITBS scores, and they [office personnel] put it in your cumulative file, and parents got a copy of it. You did okay or you didn’t do okay. Nothing else was said about it. Now, we keep referring to it [ITBS scores].

Assistant Principal Trent agreed that the data-driven focus resulted in the school “working smarter”:

We would take these tests in the past. We’d take the standardized test, and we would see the information as the end result. I haven’t been an administrator that long, so even as a classroom teacher, yeah, those were the results. You just keep moving on. You just keep doing what you’re doing. Now, we’re looking at how can we do this better. Maybe not working harder, but working smarter. That’s what the data and those kinds of things are doing for us. We’re forced to say, “Okay, yes, those were the scores. Now, because of them, we need to make improvements.”

Giving assessments without a clear sense of how to use the results is no longer acceptable to these administrators. Using data to inform instructional decisions is having an influence on educational practices at School B.

Instructional practices at the classroom level are monitored for their influence on student achievement. As Principal Smith reported:

It lets the teachers know that these are my kids and how are they doing. This is what we did in the fall as a building. You want to focus on 6th and 7th grades. We know this is where they scored this year as a group. This is what the state is looking at. Now, what can we do this next year with our kids?

Assistant Principal Randal also described how data influenced classroom practices:

It [NCLB] has brought us together as a team to make sure that we’re constantly monitoring our student academic progress in the areas of reading and math, which is our focus from the district standpoint.... We are testing and being accountable from pre-test to post-test, collecting data, and being able to let the data show that we are progressing other than just saying that I feel were doing better or I feel the
students are improving. We have got to be able to show that they’re improving. For the most part, I think we have come together.

The vision of the principals is data-driven. Student outcomes are measured by data. With attention to instructional practices that lead to results, the message is pervasive. As Principal Smith stated, “I think it has put the focus on the administrators. You have the data. You had better be sharing the data, and what can you do with the data.” The benefits of data-driven decision-making process seem evident to these leaders. The vision of the administrators is to use data to inform instructional decisions.

**Addressing staff morale.** A sense of frustration is evident in this building. The administrators expressed empathy for their staff members with a clear understanding that improvement is necessary. The increased demand on their staff has not lessened the need to move forward. Principal Richard Smith explained:

I think what we’re doing for kids is much better. We know what we’re doing and what needs to happen. The public needs to get the best out of their teachers and administrators. Every kid deserves that. Of course, I feel my teaching staff is on overload right now, but we’re asking more and more.

Remaining stagnant is not an option for these administrators. Students and community members will depend upon the leaders and their staff to improve student achievement. At School B, there is no room for blame or complacency as the goal is clear: increase student achievement. Assistant Principal Mathew Randall explained:

The key thing is to make sure that everyone understands the information and not to blame the media or anyone else…. The intent is to improve education. If we take it just for that, I think we’ll all be okay and not be too critical or not take it too personal that we are a building that is sited. We just have to keep working toward the goal, which is to improve education.
With so much at stake, it would stand to reason that staff members would react. The reaction has been a sense of frustration that may be born out of fear as Assistant Principal Trent reported:

There is more a sense of what’s really at stake. What if we go through all of these measures to help increase test scores and they don’t increase? What really happens then? So, it has left a sense of urgency and maybe even fear with faculty members. We have people who care very much about what happens with the kids, but as professionals, they also worry about how does this affect my job.

The leaders addressed a clear sense of concern by staff members for the welfare of their students and for the future of their educational careers. The administrators share their concerns and must balance pressure and support: “I understand there is a level of concern. If you raise people’s level of concern, they’re either going to rise up and meet that or not. But, you just can’t carry that too far. I am not always sure that beating someone to death is productive” (Assistant Principal Trent). Increased student achievement results will depend on teachers sensing both pressure and support is the view of the administrators.

These administrators create clear professional expectations for their staff members. Principal Smith described his message to teachers:

If you want me to treat you as a professional, I will. If you’re not going to act like a professional then I am going to have to do what I have to do as an administrator. I have no problem calling in teachers to say, “Do you plan on being here next year? You know if not, fine. If you’re not going to buy in as a team member then maybe you need to look somewhere else.” But like I tell people, you’re not going to be able to escape NCLB. No matter where you go, whether your working hard now, you’re going to be working just as hard, wherever you go.

These administrators seeking different results with a heightened sense of urgency will not compromise expectations for hard work and improved student achievement.
Such an undertaking requires a team approach with the administrators experiencing the struggles and successes alongside their staff members. Describing their response to the SINA designation, Principal Smith stated, “There is more of an effort now to collaborate with all teachers. I think the message to everybody is that we have to work together. If we don’t, then the state will come in and do it for us.” Assistant Principal Randall agreed that collaboration was an effective strategy to meet the goals of NCLB:

I see more of a collective effort now from the different departments trying to work toward some common goals. I think it’s a step in the right direction. We are all conscious and aware of the district expectations in terms of where we’d like all of our students to be with the NCLB legislation in effect.

The central administration has also provided assistance to teachers: “We are getting great assistance from the district office and superintendent in terms of helping us with different strategies, different innovations, and new practices that are proven to be effective in other school districts” (Assistant Principal Randall). These leaders have chosen a collaborative approach to address staff morale and to achieve their goal of increasing student achievement. With empathy for their staff members’ mixed feelings and a commitment to results, the administrators balance pressure to increase student achievement with support for their teachers.

**Assuring teacher quality.** Before NCLB, the state of Iowa began to focus on standards and criteria that would define a quality educator. The Iowa Teaching Standards (ITS) states 42 different criteria that align to eight standards (Appendix B). The standards provide an advantage to school leaders who must address teacher practices. For these school leaders, the Iowa Teaching Standards are becoming an institutionalized
practice that will support conversations around quality educational practices. Assistant Principal Jones described how the ITSs might help his school:

Before teachers were content to stay in a place where they weren’t exactly happy, and administrators were just happy to have a body, to have someone there. With this model, you can say to a veteran teacher you are not meeting standards. The expectations are that you’re doing these things and you’re not doing these things.

Mary Trent added, “If you can’t work well with all kids, you shouldn’t be teaching…. We have to find ways to bring out the best in our students, and that’s what we focus on.”

The ITSs provide a set of clear criteria that defines quality teacher practices with the hope that all educators will be quality through a clearly articulated evaluation system. For these administrators, the criteria guide reflective conversations centered on quality classroom teachers.

When discussing student achievement, the conversation invariably will turn to the quality of the teacher in the classroom. As the person most closely relating to students on a daily basis, teacher influence is critical. Good teaching has always been part of this school’s culture and to suggest something else would be offensive: “We have very good teachers. Every system out there does. There are people that need to work on it, and we work with teachers that need the help” (Assistant Principal Trent). While good teaching is one part of the equation, a consistent delivery of instructional targets district-wide is another.

The No Child Left Behind legislation is no exception calling for quality educators in every classroom with clear, consistent instructional targets. Assistant Principal Brian Jones spoke candidly about a variance in teacher quality at School B:
I would have to say there are some teachers who would benefit from moving on. I know there are some teachers here who aspire to teach the kids that are striving to perform with excellence. They don’t want to be with mediocre students. We have some of those, a lot of those students here at School B. We have some teachers who are placed in areas where they don’t get the chance to work with those students [striving to perform with excellence]. So, there’s frustration. I’m seeing an adverse effect on classroom management and some of the relationships between the teacher and students which results in disciplinary problems. If this dynamic is going on, there’s absolutely no learning taking place. I see that more often than I should.

School leaders also questioned the current district practices of seniority and transfers as hurdles to providing a quality teacher for every classroom. The present system for teacher transfers may penalize those buildings identified in need of improvement. Teachers with seniority have the flexibility to request a transfer to another building if a position opens. Assistant Principal Trent reported:

If I am doing everything I can possibly do and the test scores don’t turn around, what happens? It leads people to start wondering if jobs open in schools where the socioeconomic status is higher, and it doesn’t look like they are in fear of being a building in need of assistance, do I want to start looking at working there.

With this type of exodus, the administrators believe a real possibility exists that the most disadvantaged students will be with the newest or least qualified teachers.

Since a quality educator is the key to student success, re-examining teacher assignments are a priority for these leaders. Assistant Principal Brian Jones stated:

It’s no longer good enough to just get by. We’re thinking we need to have qualified teachers in their positions. We can’t make excuses. They are going to have to survive in this life regardless of where they come from. We have to equip them with the tools to do that.

With staff turnover as a barrier, confronting the reality is critical. When asked about tackling the issues of seniority and teacher transfers, Assistant Principal Trent responded, “If they have seniority and something opens up in another building, they put their name
in for it. If they have seniority, they get it.” Mary goes on to add, “You’re a better person than I am if you going to fix that right now. All of that has to be negotiated.”

With their hands somewhat tied in this area, the school leaders focus on what is within their locus on control, expectations for students.

High expectations are articulated for all students in this district through their standards and benchmarks as well as the expectations established by NCLB. However, the practical application is more difficult. In an effort to be helpful to challenging students, some teachers may lower expectations in hopes their students will experience some success, which will breed further success. Assistant Principal Jones reported:

Some of the teachers come in with their own set of values and their own ideas of what each student should be able to do. After working with the students, I think often times they re-adjust, re-evaluate, and scale down what they planned on doing. I won’t say they’re not giving it their all, but I do think their expectations change over time.

Lowering expectations for certain students is unacceptable. Assistant Principal Randall explained, “We try to keep that [lowered expectations] out of our building and try to make sure that all expectations are high regardless of where they [the students] come from, what they look like, or who they profess to be.”

The influence of NCLB on the internal accountability at School B manifests itself through the administrators’ vision for a data-driven system. The leaders’ vision seeks results that will inform instruction. The need for quality educators is foremost for these administrators. Clearly recognizing the difference a quality teacher can make in student learning, there are high expectations for all teachers and students in this building.
Influence of Public Accountability on Leadership

There is a clear influence of NCLB on the internal accountability within School B. With high expectations for staff, a balance of pressure and support, a data-driven vision, these school leaders hold themselves and the staff accountable for student learning. Traditionally, public accountability has been reserved for extra-curricular activities. Parents and community members attend and evaluate the value added to the total learning experience with the fine arts programs and the sports programs. With NCLB, this public accountability has moved into the area of academic achievement. All students must be achieving at the prescribed level of proficiency or the parent has the right to remove their child from that SINA building and place them in another building that they believe will provide better results.

The public accountability inherent in NCLB has significantly influenced the administrators at School B. Forced to combat a negative public perception with the community and the parents, the principals are working to increase awareness about NCLB in hopes of clarifying the expectations and challenges of the legislation. In addition, the administrators must convince parents that their child will be able to achieve proficiency and receive a quality education while attending School B.

Combating a negative public perception. The response from this leadership team has been to confront the designation of SINA aggressively. The response to the public's reaction was no exception. Principal Smith described his response that Sunday afternoon in August 2003 to School B being designated as a SINA:

We were always the school that parents wanted to come to because of the student-teacher relationship. We treat our kids right here. The community says it. I think
that was the biggest thing that hurt us as a staff. The papers came out. School B was a school in need of assistance. I remember reading it that morning. Does that mean I'm not a very good administrator? Does that mean we're not very good teachers? That really hurt. That was the biggest thing here to swallow our egos, and say, now what are going to do about it. God, do we want the state to come in and taking our building? Of all the horrors you hear about, that kind of stuff was probably the biggest thing that really hurt us as a staff. It really got me going. From the Sunday morning that [the SINA list] was in the paper in August, I spent most of that Sunday saying how am I going to combat all of this. What am I going to tell my teachers, and what are we going to do about it.

As expected, parents were concerned. These school leaders faced the issue with resolve to be better than before. Principal Smith offered, “Some people jumped on the band wagon that I want my kid out of here. No matter were you go you have to face these kinds of issues. I think we have gotten over it, but again the challenge is to improve what were doing with teaching and learning.”

The administration believes a better-informed public will lessen the impulse to remove their child from the school. Principal Jones discussed the impact of greater public awareness of NCLB:

With NCLB, I think part of the shock value is starting to wear off not just for educators but the community as a whole. When they [the community] started to see some of the “good schools” being sited and looked at the list from throughout the state, you start to realize that as effective as you are you may not be proficient compared to someone else, but then you set your own standard. We’ve come so far with our goal. You have to realize that eventually everyone should be sited and be on the list. There’s only so far you can go.

As the community begins to better understand NCLB’s goals and requirements, their influence on public accountability will adjust. The SINA designation prompts the administrators to work diligently to alter the public’s negative perception of School B. The leaders believe parents will be less likely to remove or not send their child to School B if they are aware of the efforts made on the students’ behalf and have a better
understanding of NCLB. With a sense of urgency, the administrators have attacked the public accountability issue with the belief that informed parents and community members are the strongest advocates for School B.

Parental awareness and involvement. While supporting an open-door policy, School B is not a neighborhood school. Located on the edge of the community, access is an issue for many parents. Principal Smith described, “We’re not a neighborhood school. We’ve students in the neighborhood, but we have fifteen busses coming in here. A lot of times the parents don’t want to drop them off and leave them here. We’re trying to work on it.” The school leaders must look for multiple opportunities to invite parents into the building.

At the beginning of the year, the leadership had every parent contacted through a personal phone call. Principal Smith reported, “We called every parent to get them here for parent-teacher conferences, an open house, and a couple of other activities at the beginning of the year. Most of the phone calls were positive; a lot of parents ignored it.” Another attempt was made to broaden the contact and support of parents. To improve attendance at parent-teacher conferences, various forms of communication were used as well as incentives. “This past grading period we had 75% for parent-teacher conferences because we sent them letters, invited them, had prizes, but still, we’re only getting 75%” (Principal Smith).

Not satisfied with the outcome, leaders explained some of the lack of parental support. Many of the parents are working more than one job or are not available due to time constraints. For others, being a student was an unpleasant experience and school is
not a comfortable place to be. This type of history reflects their unwillingness to participate in school activities. Assistant Principal Trent described this reluctance:

Many of our parents don’t want to come to conferences. Some of it’s economic. They don’t have time, and they’re working all of these jobs. But, some of them are parents who have negative feelings about school from when they were in school. They went to conferences. They didn’t do well. Their parents had to hear about their lack of success. They don’t want to come and listen to it about their own child.

Principal Smith agreed, “We have 25% [parents] out there, especially at the sixth grade, that don’t show up for conferences. Your kid’s first year in middle school, and you don’t show up for whatever reason. A lot of those were low SES and minority students.”

The leadership continues to seek innovative ways to involve parents. One such evening has been the Family Fun Night as described by Principal Smith, “Our Family Fun Night is a family reading night for our School B celebration. We try to get parents in here. We go to the effort. We even have busses out at various sites, so there is transportation.” Though well attended, the problem remains that School B is not a neighborhood school. Principal Smith explained the challenge of parental involvement:

This is a place where busses pick my kids up, bring them out, and bring them home later in the day. We are so far removed from most of the kids who go to school here from where they actually live. It becomes a tougher issue that way.

School B has confronted the fact that their school is not a neighborhood school. Even though parental involvement is more difficult than it is for other buildings in the district, the leaders continue to address increased parental awareness and involvement. Assistant Principal Randall described the complexity:

There’s not a quick fix obviously. There are highly skilled people who are running this building or have been running this building, and they haven’t figured
it out. I wouldn’t think that I could walk in and wave a wand and be done either. But, we have to be more creative and work a little harder.

However, a lack of parental involvement is not the scapegoat for low student achievement scores. The administrators realize that with or without parental involvement, student outcomes must improve. Principal Randall reported, “Whoever comes through the door, regardless of whether they can read, write, or have made all A’s, B’s, D,’s or U’s, we will take those students and try to continue to work with them and get them where they need to be.” Assistant Principal Trent shared the feelings of her colleague, “I think once they get into this building we need to make sure they are interested and want to be here. We do everything we can. We don’t just give up on them.”

The leaders have responded aggressively to the influence of NCLB on public accountability. The administrators believe that their non-neighborhood school status does not exempt parents from involvement in their child’s educational experience. Through a variety of strategies, parents are encouraged to participate and support their child. However, with or without parental support, the goal for students in School B is learning. These administrators believe that parental involvement improves student achievement but is not a necessity.

**Leadership**

Emerging as a theme independent of the conceptual lens of contemporary agency theory, leadership was evidenced in the responses of the participants. From this theme, several subcategories were brought forward: assertive leadership, authority granted leadership, and lack of autonomy.
Leadership Style

NCLB and the SINA designation have influenced the leadership styles of these administrators in three areas. First, the leadership style has become more assertive. Second, there is an authority granted through the legislation that supports the administrators’ work. Finally, the loss of autonomy is viewed as a necessary trade-off for improvement results.

Assertive leadership. Leadership is highly visible in the efforts to close the student achievement gap, and the entire administrative team views themselves as part of the solution. In response to the SINA designation, the administrative team became assertive in implementing necessary changes. Assistant Principal Randall explained the influence of NCLB on leadership style:

If NCLB wasn’t in place, I don’t know how many administrators would take the time to break down all of this information, all of our kids and how they scored. You probably had a lot of schools say, okay, well our special needs kids are you know, we get those facts. How much do you share or not share as an administrator? I think it’s [NCLB] put the focus on the administrator. You had better be sharing the data and what you can do with the data.

Knowing that different results are required, these school leaders chose to initiate strategies in their building that some might call controversial.

With a strong focus to raise student achievement scores, one strategy initiated is the use of incentives. Grade level teams have been invited to motivate their students to do well on the ITBS through external rewards. Financial resources have been set aside to support movies, treats, cookies, and popcorn. Principal Smith explained:

We have spent a lot of effort this last year with our teachers to try to motivate kids to do well on the test. We’ve done everything under the sun to try to motivate
them [students] to do well on the tests. You don’t just pop up with a test that month. It’s a yearly process.

Whether or not these initiatives are successful remains to be seen, but there is no doubt this leadership team is assertively pursuing the need to improve their test scores.

Authority granted leadership. Once your building is designated a school in need of assistance, an opportunity for leadership to move forward with initiatives that might not have taken place otherwise becomes available. Assistant Principal Trent described this opportunity:

I think that NCLB with the accountability piece has increased awareness for people, and raised their level of concern. We will continue some of the positive things we’ve started and keep working toward them. Honestly, some of the things we’re doing know we should have been doing any way.

NCLB has granted these administrators the authority to prioritize initiatives to increase student achievement in reading and mathematics. In allocating time and resources to academic initiatives, these leaders struggled with the risk and benefits of “teaching to the test.” Assistant Principal Mary Trent explained:

NCLB is an academic program. Increasingly, schools are social institutions. We do a lot more than academics here. Part of the intrusiveness of this legislation is that you’re forced to make decisions about which part of this do I take care of for the child, which part is more important. Can we do both? If we can do both, how? Is there going to funding? Often the answer to funding is no.

Although maybe “not buying” the focus on achievement and test scores, the administrators were granted authority by NCLB to focus on those issues.

These choices have raised the level of concern for some administrators. Principal Mary Trent described her apprehension:

Increasingly, I believe that more and more emphasis is being put on the test. Do we need to teach to the test? If the only thing that matters are the test scores, I
worry that some things will get lost. I’m not sure everybody is convinced that these tests have the real story about what’s going on in a child’s life and whether they have made gains or not. Does the test we’re using really measure a child’s success later? How they interact with their teachers, peers, and the emotional intelligence, it doesn’t record those kinds of things.

Assistant Principal Jones supported the concern for the whole child, “Right now we are driven by test scores. So, the time that we could have used to make a connection with students is now done through math or silent reading. Who’s to say if that’s right or wrong, but I think it’s needed.” Struggling with the choices, the leadership has the authority to initiate an academic focus.

The legislative authority to prioritize efforts to improve reading and mathematics scores has influenced other stakeholder groups to support School B’s work. Principal Smith explained, “There are some community organizations and groups lending their support now. They don’t want a school in their hometown being labeled. Those types of things have been encouraging. People want to support us wherever they can.” This support has also been extended from the school board and appears to be welcomed. Principal Smith stated, “They’re involved now because we are on the list. I wish there would be more board members out here. They try to support us.”

The NCLB legislation has provided additional leverage for requesting and receiving financial resources. Assistant Principal Jones explained, “Financially, a lot of resources have come our way as well as the other schools that need to improve their scores. We’ve gotten some innovative programs established.” The NCLB legislation granted the administrators the authority to prioritize reading and mathematics results as well as to request and receive additional resources. Although struggling with the
"narrowed mission of the school", the administrators are using the NCLB granted authority to require increased efforts to improve students' academic achievement.

**Lack of autonomy.** When you access the authority provided through this legislation to benefit your building, there would seem to be a need to relinquish autonomy on behalf of the leadership. When interviewees at School B were asked about the threat of NCLB to their autonomy, the answer was resounding: They do not feel they have autonomy to lose. Assistant Principal Trent summarized the feelings of her colleagues:

> As an assistant principal, there are a lot of layers on top of us. We go out to try to carry things out, but yet, we're not necessarily in on the decision making process of what we're carrying out.... The hierarchy would still exist with or without NCLB. There's just greater pressure. We are getting more from folks on top of us.

According to the school leaders interviewed, the lack of autonomy was present prior to accessing the authority granted through NCLB to increase student achievement results in reading and mathematics. In accessing the authority granted through NCLB, there was no autonomy to relinquish.

While each school leader has very different responsibilities, they have worked together as an administrative team to respond to NCLB. There is a sense of collaboration as Principal Smith expressed the strong need to keep his administrative team informed:

> That's just one of those differences in being the old administrative type where you're expected to know it all first and them disseminates it. Well, one person can't do it all or two people can't do it all. It takes a whole team.

Although the administrative team collaborates to achieve the NCLB goals, the principal has the decision making power to determine the school building's direction: "There is a
difference where the buck stops. I may have ideas. My colleagues may have ideas, but it is the principal that gets to decide which direction we’re headed. That’s the direction we have to head” (Assistant Principal Trent).

Principal Smith explained his responsibility:

We all have to understand these are areas that we have to cover, but it’s my job to make sure I keep them involved and up to date on what’s happening. We do that through our administrative meetings that we have each Monday. We have updates, where we’re heading for the week, what’s going on, and NCLB. You just have to say we are going to do this as an administrative team.

The administrators of School B accept the “top-down” directives inherent in NCLB. The leaders do not sense a loss of autonomy in accepting these directives, but perceive NCLB as “more of the same” top to bottom structure.

NCLB has influenced the leadership of School B. The leadership is taking on a more assertive role to meet the requirements and deadlines of NCLB. Administrators are accessing the authority granted through the legislation to accomplish the necessary results. The lack of autonomy accompanying the legislation is not perceived to be a sacrifice as the autonomy did not exist before NCLB. As Assistant Principal Mary Trent stated, “There is no autonomy.”

Summary of Results: School B

Administrators reported a congruence of interests between School B and the NCLB legislation. This congruence of interests is evidenced in the perception of the legislation as a welcomed intrusion, which has focused the district’s work on closing the student achievement gap. Clear goals for the school and an understanding of what needs to be accomplished have been articulated with clear timelines. A results-oriented
approach to student learning is endorsed to assist the teachers in reaching the prescribed levels of proficiency as defined by NCLB. Knowing the challenges some students will face in reaching the prescribed levels of proficiency; every effort is being made to be hopeful but realistic.

The information flow inherent in the NCLB legislation has influenced the response of leadership. The leaders perceived a need to support teachers as the information became public. The administrative team understood the challenges for their staff and addressed the challenges by working collaboratively to increase student achievement. The flow of information also required the administrators to increase the involvement of their primary stakeholders, the parents. To become more responsive to parents and community members, the administrators sought out various communication venues to increase the likelihood of an informed staff, parents, and community.

The accountability inherent in NCLB and SINA designation influenced the leadership both internally and externally. The internal accountability has moved the administrators to create a vision for the building that was data-driven. The internal accountability following the SINA designation influenced staff morale. Administrators responded by balancing pressure for improved results with empathetic support. The leaders focused on assurance of teacher quality by minimizing staff turnover and providing the best match between teacher and students. The Iowa Teaching Standards served as a guide to facilitate difficult conversations around instruction and quality issues. The external accountability of NCLB has required that administrators combat the negative public perception attached to being designated a school in need of assistance.
Targeting parents as a key stakeholder group, efforts have been made to keep them informed and involved in their child’s learning experience.

NCLB and the SINA designation have influenced the leadership styles of these administrators. There is an assertive nature to their leadership style as they move quickly to meet the requirements for increases in student achievement. Authority has been granted and accessed by the school leaders to make decisions that might be viewed as narrow but necessary. In addition, these leaders did not view the loss of autonomy that results from accessing legislative authority as a problem. The administrators believe they did not have autonomy to relinquish, since decisions have consistently and traditionally been “top-down”.

Cross-Site Analysis

Each of school buildings involved in this study, and indeed all of the eleven school buildings designated in need of assistance, exist in a unique context that is cultivated by people, environment, and social interaction. Therefore, no attempt to generalize the findings of the three contexts will be offered. With qualitative research, generalization of the findings is not the goal. A qualitative approach provides a description of the complex nature of school reform and its influence on these school leaders. The purpose of the study was to examine school leaders’ responses to the NCLB legislation and the SINA designation through the lens of the principal-agency relationship. This following research questions guided this study:

1. How does the school leadership negotiate the interests of NCLB and the local school building?
2. How does the information flow of NCLB requirements influence the school leadership?

3. How does the public accountability system of NCLB influence the school leadership?

Agency theory provided a lens through which the data were collected and analyzed. The following themes emerged in School A, School B, and the Upper Administration Study.

**Conflicting Goals and Objectives**

Agency theory literature would suggest that conflicting goals and interests are fundamental to the principal-agent relationship. Running counterintuitive to this concept as described in agency theory, the school leaders in all three sites reported a willingness to align their student achievement efforts with those specified in the NCLB legislation. The administrators believe the congruence of interests will increase the possibility of improving student achievement for low performing students and the successful implementation of the legislation in the school district. According to Coleman (1990), this congruence is in the best interest of the agent in this relationship:

Given that the process of changing one’s interests involves internal costs, and thus ordinarily proceeds more slowly than the process of exchanging control over events or resources, then if these costs are overcome, an agent who changes his interests by identifying with a principal is subjectively better off than one who does not. Having changed his interests, the agent is satisfying his own interests when he acts to satisfy those of the principal. Moreover, when the principal’s interests are satisfied, the pleasure of the principal gives the agent further satisfaction. If in addition the agent receives exchanges benefits from the principal, in the form of material rewards such as wages or gratitude, then he still further benefits (this time satisfying some of his interests that are not identical with those of the principal). Thus, he is subjectively far better off than he would be if he had not modified his interests and had experienced only this last source of satisfaction (p. 156).
As they move quickly to facilitate change, the ability to minimize the internal costs and increase access to the community in a more conducive political climate are perceived to be benefits of this congruence of interests for the school leaders. Principal Randal Johnson reported,

For the schools that have been considered successful, I know they don’t like it [NCLB] because it turns attention on them when they’re doing a decent job. But for the schools that have been struggling, we would not have been able to take from the rich without this legislation.

Assistant Principal Jones also reported the increase in resources to their school building, “Financially, a lot of resources have come our way as well as the other schools that need to improve. We’ve gotten some innovative programs established.” The NCLB legislation has brought additional resources to the SINA buildings, and the legislation has brought an increase in community support.

NCLB has influenced the community’s attention to the needs of School A and School B. As Principal Smith explained, “There are some community organizations and groups lending their support now. They don’t want a school in their hometown being labeled. Those types of things have been encouraging. People want to support us wherever they can.” Similarly, the school board has increased its attention to the schools designated in need of assistance. Principal Johnson reported, “They had to do it. It’s the law.... Administrators have known all along. It’s just the political climate doesn’t allow you to do it.” With the allocation of resources based on need and the support of the community and the school board, a more conducive political climate has enabled change to occur swiftly. An alignment of the school district’s and the school buildings’ interests...
with the requirements of the NCLB legislation minimized internal costs and permitted the change process to move at a rapid pace.

The administrators viewed the alignment of the school buildings’ interests and the interests of NCLB as beneficial to successfully meet their school goals. This alignment of interests is not the same as changing one’s interests as the interests do not have to be identical. Alignment of interests occurs when the agent and principal’s self-interests parallel each other (Lauk, 1996). In this case, the parallel interests were evident.

A focus on student achievement, especially for those students who have not been in the spotlight, was welcomed by both school buildings and the district. Principal Smith explained why federal involvement was welcomed by the staff:

In the old days, you might have said, “If a kid doesn’t want to learn that’s just too bad. You know you are not going to learn. Just don’t take anybody down with you, okay.” It has made us simply say, “Hey, those attitudes, well kiss them goodbye.”

The leadership acknowledged some students have not been achieving in their buildings. As Principal Ronald Johnson reported the federal involvement made that fact public:

The scores at School A are published now, but I knew ten years ago. If you said based on test scores how would you rank your middle schools? I would have had School A four out of four.... There’s never been a secret, so it just helped everybody to say we now know, and we can’t pretend anymore.

Superintendent Hill reported the same perception, “It has been that way for a long, long time. Was it acceptable before? No. Did we worry about it as much before? No, because that was just those kids. I think it is a little bit of a wakeup call.”

The need to address the achievement gap is another interest across all three sites that is congruent with the interests of NCLB. Achieving the best possible results calls for
a recognition that a problem exists. Without exception, these administrators confirmed the existence of a student achievement gap in the buildings designated in need of assistance and the gap has been present for a long time. Principal Ronald Johnson stated, “This isn’t necessarily a new step, especially for this particular building and these students. The numbers go back year after year after year. We talk about the achievement gap all the time.” Assistant Principal Trent shared the same sentiment, “In this particular district, we have been trying to focus on the achievement gap for a number of years.” Removing this gap is congruent with the goals of NCLB and the administrators’ interests.

NCLB’s requirements for schools in need of assistance are clearly specified. Whether fueled by the sanctions or the public accountability requirements of NCLB, schools in this district are focused on closing the gap. Principal Johnson reflected, “If it were not for this legislation, I don’t believe we would be putting the energy into these students who have been overlooked. A priority that was on the back burner is now full boil on the front.” The superintendent agreed, “As superintendent, I am trying everything I know how to do to push students forward seeing them perform at a higher level.” This “push” extends to all low performing students, a goal of both this district and NCLB.

Across both buildings, the leadership agreed the bottom line is student achievement. Principal Richard Smith reported, “We can knock NCLB, and say it’s a bad law. But, the bottom line is our kids. There’s no running away from what we’re going to do.” Assistant Principal Jones echoed this sentiment, “There are mixed feelings, mixed emotions about NCLB. But if they’re raising the quality of education, if they’re raising the standards of what’s expected of teachers and how to present the information to
students, it’s going to help student that are on the low end of achievement.” NCLB is focused on raising student achievement. These school leaders similarly believe that changing practices to seek different results will benefit their learners. The legislation highlights that need and aligns with the interests of the school leaders.

The goal of proficiency for all students is consistent for both NCLB and these administrators. All students include subgroups that typically may have demonstrated less successful student achievement results. With aggregate student achievement data, it is possible for these students to go unnoticed. Disaggregating the student achievement data for the required subgroups minimizes the likelihood of this happening. Although significant barriers may prohibit some students from achieving proficiency, both the SINA building principals and the district administration accept the challenge. Principal Miller describes the renewed focus on subgroups:

I think that it [NCLB] gives some real focus to the subgroups. It makes us focus now on smaller groups, not just your whole student achievement, not just your whole population, but looking at each group. How does that group learn? What does this group need? How are we identifying the strategies that work best with this group, and how are we able to move is based upon what we know about a particular group. It makes us a little bit more refined in how we are identifying students.

For students who are not performing at grade level for cognitive or behavioral reasons, the NCLB requirements may be unrealistic expectations and create a sense of futility in the leadership’s efforts to move “all” students to a prescribed level of proficiency. Superintendent Hill explained, “If you give the best runner in the world a ten-pound bowling ball to put on their leg and tell them they have to wear it in the Olympics, they are not going to make it. No matter what they do or how hard they try, they are not going
to make it.” Assistant Principal Mary Trent described the inequities of the proficiency requirement for students with special needs: “When you test special needs students on an eighth grade level who are in eighth grade but work at a second grade level, they make gains or not enough. The next year you do it again. We’re set up to fail.” Principal Smith stated:

It probably scares a lot of administrators. Why are we doing all of this? We know that we are never going to get some of the special needs students up to being proficient. We are always going to be on the watch. You have to accept that as a challenge. You want to do the best for the kids.

Accepting the challenge to increase student achievement, the school leaders have begun to prioritize the finite time they have available with students. Principal Trent explained that difficult decisions are being made:

I think the immediacy of it [SINA designation] forces you to take some things away that you don’t want to take away. For example, in order to help increase reading scores, we have kids in this Fast Forward program. That pulls them out of one of their exploratory. You know for some kids those are the best things they have in the day. They like to go and work with tools in industrial tech or do things in family consumer science or work on the computers...or whatever the exploratory is. But, we’re taking these kids and saying, “No, we need to be doing Fast Forward because it’s going to increase your reading capabilities down the road.” That’s hard for kids.

Although challenging, the interest in increasing student achievement for low performing students is a goal for both the administrating “agents” and the NCLB “principals”.

Assistant Principal Jones described the benefits of this congruence of interests concerning results:

There are mixed feelings, mixed emotions about NCLB. But if they’re raising the quality of education, if they’re raising the standards of what’s expected of teachers and how to present the information to students, it’s going to help students that are on the low end of achievement. I think it’s going to eventually affect
those kids and help those kids on the high end. It's going to improve education, which should help everyone. So, I don't have a problem with that.

With a sense of urgency, the leadership accepts the challenge of NCLB with a “no excuse” and “no blame” approach. The superintendent stated, “We have subgroups that are performing, and some want to point a finger saying it is this group’s fault. I cannot talk about, and I cannot let that happen. These are all our children.” Assistant Principal Jones added, “We are trying to put the image out there that as kids come in we will try to educate them, and they are going to be fine as high school students and fine as adults in life.” Principal Johnson concurred, “I can’t blame the teachers, and the teachers can’t blame the students, and whoever shows up at the front door, we had better teach them. If our best shot isn’t good enough, then we better get someone who best shot is.”

The building administrators in both buildings designated in need of assistance and the superintendent clearly perceive a congruence of interests with the goals of NCLB. As Lauk (1996) acknowledges, “In spite of the significance attached to the role of conflicting self-interests by principals and agents, it has also been observed that conflict is not a necessary ingredient to every agency relationship” (p. 113). This absence of conflicting goals and interests to increase student achievement for all low performing students was consistent with the findings in this study and evidenced through interviews with the school leaders. A congruence of interests between NCLB and the school administrators focused on increasing student achievement for all low performing students, while the administrators recognized the challenges inherent in that alignment of interests.

The congruence of interests between the school buildings and the NCLB legislation has accelerated the change process, garnered local support from the
community and the school board, and led to an increase in resources for School A and School B. School A, School B, and the superintendent welcomed the intrusion as an opportunity to focus on the student achievement gap with a results-oriented approach that would support increases in student achievement. While the agency theory literature would suggest that within the rational-choice paradigm self-interests would supercede the interests of the principal, there was no evidence of such behavior in this study. Rather, the alignment of interests has resulted in a cooperative relationship that is believed will lead to an opportunity for increases in student achievement.

**Asymmetry of Information**

Across all sites, the flow of information is a hierarchical structure that begins with the Iowa Department of Education. Information from the Department flows to the district level administrator who in turn shares that information with the building level leadership. The superintendent described the relationship, “They have been a good partner for us. They have helped us along the way. They have provided guidance as we have needed it and answered our questions as fast as they knew them.” Internally, the teachers receive their information from the building level leadership. Externally, communication with community members and parents is through a variety of organizational structures.

Internally communication begins with the superintendent. The information regarding NCLB and schools designated in need of assistance comes from the superintendent to the building principals. The principals have the responsibility to share the information with their staffs. Assistant Principal Mary Trent explained, “I don’t really know who all was there. I know he [the principal] gave the information to all three
of us.... The administrators knew, and then he [the principal] gave it to the rest of the faculty.” Principal Johnson extended the context for communication of information, “We tell them this is what we’ve got, and we always look for something positive.” The superintendent shared his confidence in the administrator’s understanding of the information and their ability to communicate effectively with their staffs: “Our teachers are pretty well schooled in NCLB.”

External communication is primarily the domain of the superintendent as he works with the media and community members: “You had better be able to do public relations or you had better have somebody with you that can do public relations.” For reaching parents and community members, the site council and newsletters appear to be the preferred approach. Principal Smith explained, “We keep parents informed through site council, newsletters, or whatever communication method we may have about smaller issues. We’re sending in our newsletters any information the district office sends to inform parents about state mandates.” Assistant Principal Jones concurred, “I think the best way it’s [communication] been done is with some of the groups that meet; the site council, the Department of Education, and primarily the principal. We all had a little part in presenting information and data to those groups.” While the communication of the work internally and externally is shared, information is expected to flow through a clear organizational structure based on positional power.

Agency theory refers to an informational advantage known as information asymmetry. Proximity to the learning experience and evidence of student achievement provides the informational advantage to the school leadership. Sandra Miller is much
closer to the learning experience than the Department of Education: “So, you’re careful about how things are happening and how you are approaching things because you are always out front, always being analyzed and baby-sat.” Principal Smith had similar feelings when he learned his school building was listed as SINA. The first question was how information was going to be processed at the building level not the state level: “From the Sunday morning that [the SINA list] was in the paper in August, I spent most of that Sunday saying how am I going to combat all of this. What am I going to tell my teachers, and what are we going to do about it.” Building principals have access to additional information from students, teachers, parents, and the community. According to agency theory, the building principals have an informational advantage-information asymmetry exists.

A principal-agent relationship that is subject to this informational advantage may result in adverse selection or shirking both elements of moral hazard. Moral hazard implies that information asymmetry exists, and the result of this informational advantage may lead the agent to behave in a way that is self-serving and does not meet the needs of the principal. Adverse selection with mandatory change addresses the willingness and capacity of the agents to perform the task. For NCLB, adverse selection would involve concern regarding the administrators’ willingness or capacity to increase student achievement for all low performing students. The leadership is clearly willing to meet the challenge of NCLB. Principal Mary Trent agreed, “It [NCLB] really made a difference in terms of helping all of us to understand the whole process better and to follow through collectively with what everybody should be doing at a given point in
Finally, the superintendent is willing to move forward with the student achievement efforts promulgated through NCLB: “Why is it that some students in a subgroup can score well? Why can’t the others? We have to put programs together to make sure all students can read and do math at grade level, which is pretty much what NCLB is asking.” The willingness to put forth the efforts to meet the expectations of NCLB seems to be evidenced. Whether or not the district has the necessary expertise to meet the expectations of NCLB remains to be seen. Regardless, the evidence would suggest that adverse selection would be minimal.

Rather than “shirking”, the asymmetry of the NCLB information flow resulted in an assertive leadership behavior described by these school leaders. Difficult unilateral decisions were made with less opportunity for site-based, democratic decision making. As Principal Johnson explained, “We’re behind and we don’t have time to discuss a lot of stuff. I think it has allowed us to be less democratic and provide more leadership.” The school leaders moved quickly to initiate change that increases student achievement. With an increased information source, school leaders responded with an assertive leadership style consistent with, not contrary to, the Department of Education’s interests.

The information asymmetry is evidenced in the variety of initiatives these administrators have undertaken. Superintendent Hill described the establishment of pullout programs to increase student learning, “If you are three or four years behind in reading comprehension, you can’t make that leap in one year. We are using time differently…. Instead of doing social studies and science, we are doing math, reading, and language arts double time.” Students have responded positively to the programs as
Superintendent Hill stated, “They know that they’re struggling readers, and they don’t want to be struggling readers.”

Another initiative involved addressing the needs of an ever-growing transient student population. A large number of students move from building to building due to their parent’s lack of stable housing. Creating a difficult learning situation for the child, the superintendent is looking at piloting a new program to establish a more constant environment for the learner: “They move five times a year, and they might be in five different elementary schools in one year.... We are going to start with two schools, and if it works like we think it’s going to, then we’ll do that for all our elementary.” The position is clearly stated. Whatever it takes to change the results for transient students is being considered. The availability of building level information enabled administrators to assertively plan for initiatives to improve student achievement. Principal Johnson stated, “I have to push to think out of that box, and sometimes people say, ‘I disagree’, and I appreciate that, but we’re still going to do it.” Assistant Principal Jones added, “Right now we are driven by test scores. So, the time that we could have used to make a connection with students is now done through math or silent reading. Who’s to say if that’s right or wrong, but I think it’s needed.” Principal Miller shared similar feelings, “Maybe just the pressure of knowing that we have to move beyond where we are with the testing and what’s happening for our kids will force us to think even further out of the tradition than we normally would.” Close to the students, the data, and the timeline, these school leaders are willing to move assertively, quickly, and decisively to create change for their students and their school building. Information asymmetry did not lead
to adverse selection or shirking but rather to the initiation of unprecedented changes consistent with the interests of the Department of Education.

As expected within this principal-agent relationship, information asymmetry exists. The information flow is clearly hierarchical. Even with the informational advantage afforded the administrators, moral hazard has not been a result. The administrators have not taken action contrary to the interests of the Department of Education, and have not “shirked” their responsibilities. The leaders are willing to implement the NCLB requirements. The asymmetry of information has moved them to quickly initiate changes necessary to improve student achievement.

**Control and Monitoring**

The third interactive pattern of control and monitoring as referenced in the conceptual framework of agency theory is the opportunity for the principal to assure that the agent is working to achieve the desired outcomes of the principal. Monitoring is necessary to confirm that the agent is responsive and accountable. Through an accountability design, the principal ensures that the agent is indeed working on his or her behalf.

The role of the “principal” in education shifts depending upon the context of the interaction. With the new NCLB educational accountability, the focus has shifted to the building level with the state, “the principal”, calling upon the building level administrators, “the agent”, to increase student achievement scores (Adams & Kirst, 1999, p. 474). The Iowa Department of Education monitors the school leader’s behaviors
through reporting of student achievement results to assure that the school leaders are working on the Department's behalf.

The accountability literature defines causal responsibility as action or inaction that causes a particular result. Accountability systems that define expectations for student performance by definition involve explicit causal responsibility (Adams & Kirst, 1999). The NCLB accountability system involves explicit causal responsibilities, including a clear obligation to act, "We have to look at our school right now." (Principal Robert Smith), discretion in choosing courses of action, "Now, we've literally broadened our options." (Principal Ronald Johnson), sufficient knowledge to predict and influence the result, "We are not afraid to say these are the problems." (Superintendent Dan Hill), and the resources to accomplish the task, "We can do things faster." (Principal Johnson).

NCLB requires public academic accountability. The academic accountability has added a new dimension to the accountability of public schools. Public accountability is not new to education; however, academic public accountability is very much a new angle and alters the business of public education as Superintendent Hill explained:

When you have public accountability that changes the way you do business.... We have to put programs together to make sure all students can read and do math at grade level, which is pretty much what NCLB is asking. They are not asking for an A student. They are asking for math and reading, soon to be science, at grade level. How do you say it is okay for kids not to be at grade level? It is not okay.

The premise is that due to public accountability "business" is changing for this public school system. As Principal Johnson reported, "Take that perception that's been out there for a long time, toss in the data that people now have access to and we can't pretend
our numbers aren’t that bad.” The leadership would agree with that statement. In fact, the stakes have become much higher.

Involving the primary stakeholders in the learning process, the leadership recognizes the need for public accountability as well as parental involvement. The challenge is to overcome the barriers to parental involvement. As Assistant Principal Trent described, “Many of our parents don’t want to come to conferences. Some of it’s economic. They don’t have time, and they’re working all of these jobs. But, some of them are parents who have a negative feelings about school from when they were in school.” The response is to open the doors and increase the accessibility to the learning environment in a non-threatening manner that assures the parent’s dignity. As Principal Smith stated, “Our Family Fun Night is a family reading night for our School B celebration. We try to get parents in here.” Principal Johnson described another option that would facilitate parental involvement in school events, “We’re just going to run the bus. You may not feel like driving. You don’t even have to call. This is where it will be, and this is the time. I don’t know if it will work, but we’ll try it.”

However, lack of parental involvement is not an acceptable excuse. Principal Miller looked at the time available to educators and the expectations for their students, “It would be ideal to have things going on outside of school to support kids, but we don’t have an impact on that. We have an impact on the time that we have them with us.” A lack of parental involvement is not the scapegoat for student achievement scores. Assistant Principal Randall reported, “Whoever comes through the door, regardless of
whether they can read, write or have made all A’s, B’s, D’s or U’s, we will take those students and try to continue to work with them and get them where they need to be.”

External accountability and public reporting are not new for school districts in Iowa. Schools have been reporting to their public annually for over five years, but there were no negative sanctions tied to student achievement. The NCLB sanctions have amplified the need to show improvement publicly. Superintendent Hills described this change: “When parents are given an opportunity to move their students from one building to another because a building is cited that is a whole different world at that point.” With higher stakes comes increased scrutiny and accountability. As “agents”, the leadership must provide indices of internal accountability to the Department of Education.

The accountability mechanisms of NCLB also affected the administrative agent both internally and externally. Internally an accelerated focus on the data-driven vision was found. Although not an explicit component of NCLB, these administrators described an increased internal accountability. Staff morale was affected and the leadership responded with empathy but continued the forward momentum of the change process. School leaders also recognized that assuring quality teachers in every classroom would enhance student achievement. Teacher evaluation was considered a necessary tool to assure teacher quality.

Both sites and the superintendent would agree that while data were collected before NCLB, they did not drive the decision making process. At best, data were reviewed on a yearly basis. The Iowa Teacher Quality Legislation enacted by the legislature in 2001 required all administrators to receive ten days of training in Data-
Drive Leadership (DDL) to assist in their role as evaluator. Coupled with NCLB, the DDL requirements could not have been timelier. The superintendent explained, "Our district was not data-driven before I came. They had data, but it was not driving what they were doing." Principal Johnson validated this viewpoint:

We have been trying to conquer these battles way before NCLB. You’re going to look at the numbers at the end of the year, and the next year, you do what you do. Now when we look at those numbers, we know that will determine who will be here, and what we can and cannot do.

Principal Miller would agree, "Now we’re looking for data. It has to be consistent data, and the teachers have to be part of it. You can’t be testing apples and oranges." If data was not part of the work prior to NCLB, data are clearly part of their work now.

The results-oriented, data-driven accountability approach moved these administrators to have empathy for staff members concerned with the consequences of the SINA designation. They had to balance a caring culture with a results-oriented approach as Principal Johnson explained, "We’re pushing, but at the same time trying to encourage and keep morale up. It does get difficult with 180 days of school and always hearing your scores are low." Principal Miller described the building’s efforts to cultivate a learning community, "I try to focus a lot on the climate and culture of the building. I need people feeling good about being here because this is a good place to be, and they like coming here." Describing their response to the sanctions associated with the SINA designation, Principal Smith stated, "There is more of an effort now to collaborate with all teachers. I think the message to everybody is that we have to work together." Superintendent Hill acknowledged the challenge, "It is a delicate balance. The reason I say that is they [the school building administrators] are trying as hard as
they know to try in most cases. For the most part, they have been doing everything
humanly possible to get this done. So, we have to give them the resources and support
along the way.”

To provide a quality education that will meet the rigorous internal accountability
standards set through NCLB, a quality teacher in every classroom is necessary. The Iowa
Teaching Standards (Appendix B) have become useful in setting clear criteria of teacher
performance that administrators use a guide for working with their staff members. As
Principal Johnson reported, “I can say you’ve got a lot of good things going on, but in
these areas, you’re not getting it.” Assistant Principal Jones was in agreement, “Before
teachers were content to stay in a place where they weren’t exactly happy, and
administrators were just happy to have a body, to have someone there.”

The Iowa Teaching Standards provide a leverage for administrators to assess
teaching practices that are questionable, inadequate, or do not align to the district
expectations as Principal Ronald Johnson reported:

I’ve had teachers say well we do such and such in this building, and I don’t know
if I want to stay. Well, that’s fine. I can appreciate that, and I can respect that.
But, this is our style of offence, and if it’s a passing game and you’re a running
back and don’t catch well, then you need to get to a team that just runs the ball.

The reason is very simple. Students need the best teacher available to them as Assistant
Principal Miller explained, “It would be ideal to have these things going on outside of
school that are great support for kids. We don’t have an impact on that. We have an
impact on the time that we have them with us.” The time is brief, and for these
administrators, every minute counts. The challenge is clear. Quality educators must be
in every classroom. Providing guidance and criteria to support quality teaching, the Iowa
Teaching Standards clearly articulate the required criteria. Administrators have not had such an advantage in the past.

Teachers must also hold high expectations for all students. Both the district and the Department of Education have an expectation that all students must be held to a high standard of success. With the best of intentions, compassionate educators may shortchange some students with lower expectations. Principal Johnson described the situation in School A:

We have people who believe that a poor child with a single parent and black skin maybe can’t achieve. So, if you can give them a warm breakfast, a warm lunch, and a snack after school with a hug that will help them.

Principal Miller confirmed this phenomenon: “Often times, we make excuses for kids who are of a certain group, and we lower our expectations because we’ve made those excuses for them. But to me, that are just that. They are excuses.” This variance in student expectations is not unique for School A. School B is experiencing the same inequity in student expectations.

Principal Jones talked about his experience of watching the deterioration of student expectations over time: “After working with the students, I think often times they re-adjust, re-evaluate, and scale down what they planned on doing. I won’t say they’re not giving it their all, but I do think their expectations change over time.” Such teacher behavior is unacceptable for the school leadership. NCLB enforces this sentiment with high expectations for all students achieving at clearly defined levels of proficiency.

To these leaders quality teaching is a critical index of internal accountability. Superintendent Hill explained, “Every time you walk into a teacher that doesn’t either
have time for a student or gives up on a student, they weren’t a high flying teacher to begin with, and that student is going to lose.” The response to teacher expectations that are below the buildings’ and district’s expectations are an opportunity to become better or leave. This issue is clearly defined. Teachers who are not performing will not be part of this district’s team. Superintendent Hill reported, “You see people that aren’t working here right now because we made them sharpen their pencils to the point they didn’t want to do that anymore. So, they quit, retired, or we asked them to leave.” These administrators believe that teacher quality will contribute to student achievement efforts.

Achieving the desired outcomes of NCLB will require internal accountability. While moving in the direction of being a data-driven system, the internal accountability accelerated the pace at which this changed occurred. The use of data to monitor results raised the level of anxiety for educators. Empathetic to the response from their staff members, the leadership gave attention to the culture of their buildings through a blend of pressure and support. However, the level of anxiety among staff members to the results-oriented approach and accountability were not deterrents to internal accountability. A quality teacher in every classroom was a non-negotiable to increase student achievement and to strengthen the internal accountability. Teacher evaluation was revisited as a critical tool in assuring high quality educators in every classroom. Both School A and School B have high expectations for teachers and students. A high standard of learning is expected for all students as Principal Trent acknowledged, “If you can’t work well with all of the kids, you shouldn’t be teaching.” Equity in student learning is a priority for these buildings with high standards for all students and staff members in the district.
The internal and external accountability requirements of NCLB are a measure of the schools productivity. NCLB is a performance-based accountability system with rules, reprimands, and sanctions to deter noncompliance. The literature would suggest that because the private sector does not have market mechanisms in place to restrain behaviors the opportunity to pursue self-interests is maximized (Lauk, 1996). With NCLB, that is not entirely the case. There are market oriented and political pressures within this legislation. For schools designated SINA, parents must be provided school choice within the district. In addition, federal and state funding is jeopardized. The public sector is also answerable to voters, taxpayers, locally elected school boards, community members, and the media, which may act to discipline or control an agent’s self-interest (Lauk, 1996). Theoretically, agency theory suggests, “within the rational choice paradigm it is assumed that rational, self-interested individuals will try to maximize their own welfare within the contexts of their organizational reward structures” (Crowson & Boyd, 1987, p.6). This study would not support that premise.

Administrators report that these rules, reprimands, and sanctions have left some educators feeling discouraged, overwhelmed, and incompetent. Nevertheless, as the leadership explained, they are empathetic to those feelings but must continue to move forward. Assistant Principal Trent summarized the teacher’s perceptions: “We have people who care very much about what happens with the kids, but as professionals, they also worry about how does this affect my job.” The concern is very real as Principal Johnson explained, “It’s going to be competitive. You have to produce, and if it appears
that you’re the stumbling block or the cause, we can’t cover for you anymore. We can’t carry you anymore.”

The stakes are very high and the sanctions very real. Concern and apprehension for the future comes at a very personal level. As Principal Mary Trent reported, “You know it’s deep down. You don’t want to be thought of as bad teachers, and sometimes when your school is named that way teachers will get blamed or the leaders of the school get blamed.” Assistant Principal Randall agreed:

I didn’t promise them anything in reference to final results because that has to come from State. We’re hoping that we’ll maybe get some relief from the tension and stress that some of my teachers are feeling. They are beginning to wonder if that means them personally or not in terms of their methods or teaching techniques.

The leadership has responded empathetically to their staff members concerns. Principal Ronald Johnson stated, “We’re pushing, but at the same time trying to encourage and keep morale up.” A blend of pressure and support was evidence among these school leaders who continue to motivate staff members in such an unsettling environment.

Leadership

Promoting agent compliance is a matter of enhancing the motivation and capacity of the agent to achieve the goals (Adams & Kirst, 1999, p. 480). As agents, the administrators must build the capacity to perform as expected. NCLB provides the necessary authority to pursue the accountability goals. As Principal Ronald Johnson acknowledged:

But for the schools that have been struggling, we would not have been able to take from the rich without this legislation. There are some people who said off the record that it needed to be done for a long time, but in their positions in the school district, they couldn’t do it. They couldn’t get the political support.
Superintendent Hill agreed, "Behind the scenes, the politics will go on heavily where you are lobbied very, very strongly.... This legislation stops that totally. What they are going to say is we have to do this. We don't have a choice." Without the authority granted through NCLB, the ability of the leadership to aggressively attack the student achievement gap would be politically unapproachable. An assertive "non-collaborative" vision resulted from NCLB; however, once the vision was "given", there was collaboration in their efforts to increase student achievement. The authorizing action was necessary to even consider achieving the goals of the NCLB.

By design, the autonomous nature of school leadership is held in check by mandating performance expectations through the accountability design. The legislative authority granted to leadership requires the sacrifice of personal autonomy. At this time, the lack of personal autonomy does not appear to be a concern. These school leaders are focused on providing a quality education for all of their students. If the legislative authority helps them move in that direction, diminished autonomy is perceived to be worth the benefits. As Principal Johnson stated, "Everybody needs leadership and some focus.... So, the autonomy, we shouldn't have too much. We do need outside leadership." A colleague, Principal Miller, supported this opinion, "The lack of autonomy is saying to me, this is the way that's going to have to be based on where we need to go." Clear goals, an articulation of the necessary steps, and the want of consistency from building to building would find the lack of autonomy as an equitable trade-off. Others describe a hierarchical structure, which has historically limited autonomy.
A hierarchical structure that originates from the federal level to the local level is present in public education. Inherent in that structure is a clear chain of leadership distribution, Superintendent Hill summarized the existing structure, “It trickles down. The feds are asking the state, the state is asking the districts, and the school boards will ask the superintendent, and the superintendent will ask the Division if it’s a bigger school.” Assistant Principal Jones concurred, “As an assistant, you’re still under the direction of the principal, and you’re going to follow through with whatever that principal says you need to do. You do that or your insubordinate.” Principal Sandra Miller expressed a similar feeling at the principal level, “So, you’re careful about how things are happening, how you’re approaching because you are always out front, always being analyzed and baby-sat.” Another colleague would go so far as to say there is no autonomy: “As an assistant principal, there are a lot of layers on top of us. We go out to try to carry things out, but yet, we’re not necessarily in on the decision making process of what we’re carrying out…. There is no autonomy” (Assistant Principal Trent).

From the superintendent to the assistant principal, the hierarchical structure to some degree drives the decision making process. Loss of autonomy for these school leaders does not appear to be a concern. Recognizing the lack of autonomy, these school leaders continue to provide leadership in the organizational structure, as it exists. Externally, the principals’ goals and objectives are assured through on-going monitoring and public accountability. Internally, the principal’s goals and objectives are assured through data-driven decision making, ensuring teacher quality through evaluation systems, and involving parents in the learning process. Student learning is the focus not
personal autonomy. These school leaders have accessed the authority granted through
the legislation to initiate change rapidly and believe that lack of autonomy is an equitable
trade-off. There are no excuses for not moving forward toward the goals of NCLB.

Agency theory describes the principal-agent relationship through conflicting goals
and interests, information asymmetry, and control and monitoring of the agent’s
behaviors to assure the principal’s goals are being pursued. The school leaders did not
demonstrate a conflict of interests and goals around increasing student achievement for
low performing students. The school leaders clearly identified several examples and
benefits of a congruence of interests between their student achievement goals and the
interests of the NCLB. In addition, they also recognize the challenges and futility in
moving “all” students to proficiency. Recognizing those challenges, the leadership has
been called upon to make difficult decisions that prioritize the learning opportunities for
students. However, they believe an alignment of their interests with NCLB’s interests
will provide an opportunity to alter a history of low student achievement.

The agency theory literature would suggest that due to the asymmetry of
information a control and monitoring system is necessary to ensure the agent is working
on behalf of the principal. While an asymmetry of information and the possibility of
moral hazard existed, these administrators adopted an assertive leadership style rather
than “shirking” responsibilities to achieve goals. The school leaders have responded to
this increased accountability with a data-driven vision that assures high teacher quality
with empathy for their staff members’ concerns. The school leaders are focused on
raising student achievement to combat a negative public perception. Innovative
opportunities are underway to increase parental awareness about NCLB and to involve parents in their child’s learning experiences. The authority granted to these administrators through NCLB permitted an aggressive pursuit of initiatives. Importantly, these leaders were willing to exchange a loss of autonomy for the authority to try to improve student outcomes. With a performance-based accountability system, the sanctions for a lack of success are disturbing to those involved in the process. The challenge for leadership is to motivate their staff members to provide the best possible services for their students.

Chapter Summary

Agency theory does provide a practical application for school-based management or a decentralized institutional structure. Findings suggest further inquiry into the use of agency theory as a theoretical framework for the study of the principal-agent relationship in the bureaucratic structure of public education. This study will contribute to that body of research using agency theory as a conceptual lens through which the institution of public education and its hierarchal structure may be analyzed.

With agency theory as the conceptual lens, the findings from this study are both supportive and counterintuitive to the existing literature base. A congruence of interests exists between the desires of the “principal”, the Iowa Department of Education, and the “agent”, the administrators. With parallel interests, the possibility of moral hazard was negated by mutual satisfaction. Both the Department of Education and the administrators viewed NCLB as a welcomed intrusion with a renewed focus on student achievement, a results-oriented approach, and a challenge for all students to reach proficiency. As the
literature suggests, this congruence of interests appears to be in the best interests of both parties in the relationship.

A clear hierarchical structure controls the flow of information. This organizational structure does invite information asymmetry, which is inherent in the principal-agent relationship. Building principals and the district superintendent had an information advantage in access to student, teacher, parents, and community input. This information asymmetry appears to be mutually beneficial as the agent is working in the best interests of both parties. Moral hazard was not evidenced. Administrative agents acted on the information congruent with, not contrary to, the "principal’s" interests. With the informational advantage, leaders assertively sought the desired outcomes and did not “shirk” their responsibilities.

The success of the principal-agent relationship is substantiated on the agent working on behalf of the principal’s goals and objectives. With the agent’s informational advantage and the principal’s lack of opportunity to determine if the agent is working in his or her best interests, monitoring of results is a necessity. This control and monitoring of results has led to an increased need for both internal and external accountability. The internal accountability was viewed as a positive influence of NCLB with a more data-driven, results-oriented approach. Unprecedented accountability influenced staff morale and culture. The administrators were attentive and empathetic to that issue, but there were “no excuses” for not moving ahead with a quality teacher in every classroom. Teacher evaluation was the tool deployed to facilitate the process of quality classroom teachers. External academic accountability is a new dimension for public schools. The
leadership worked diligently to involve one of their primary stakeholders in the learning process, the parents. However, lack of parental involvement was not an excuse for poor student performance. Again, there were "no excuses" for not increasing student achievement.

The NCLB performance-based system to manage productivity gave administrators the authority to pursue the goals of NCLB. However, this accountability system also controls and restrains leadership autonomy. To reach the desired results, the leadership has accessed the authority granted through the legislation, accepted the control, monitoring, and loss of autonomy, and continued to motivate staff members who might be less than enthusiastic. As supported through the agency theory literature, these school leaders believe that both principal and agent will benefit if there is alignment between their interests.

The utility of agency theory as a lens through which to discuss the cross-site findings has been presented in the section on results. The leadership literature will guide the discussion of the conclusions and recommendations. The business literature that focuses on leadership will serve as the framework for discussing the response of school leadership to NCLB and the SINA designation. The work of Collins (2001) and his study of business leaders that have created and effectively sustained positive results for their corporations over a period of 15 years will illuminate the challenges faced by leaders in schools that have been designated as failing. In addition, Michael Fullan (2003) has reviewed the work of Collins and provides an educational application and analysis that supports Collins' conclusions. Coupled with the reform literature and with Collin's work
providing the framework, the contributions of Fullan (2003), Hunter (2004), Lambert (2003), Reeves, (2004), and Sergiovanni (2000) will contribute to the discussion of leadership's response to NCLB and the SINA designation.
CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

An accountability system provides many challenges for school leadership. Performance-oriented "new educational accountability" has introduced several important shifts in public education accountability (Elmore, Abelmann, & Fuhrman, 1996). First, governors and state legislators play roles that are more prominent in education through the development and implementation of policy. Second, states focus their efforts on high academic standards with indicators that describe performance. Third, accountability systems are linked with consequences for not meeting expectations, and fourth, the school building is the focus for accountability through reporting of student achievement data.

Early evidence has shown that student achievement scores on prescribed assessments have influenced what happens in the classroom (Murnane & Levy, 1996). However, "test-based accountability without substantial investments in internal accountability and instructional improvement is unlikely to elicit better performance from low-performing students and schools. Furthermore, the increased pressure of test-based accountability alone is likely to aggravate the existing inequalities between low-performing and high-performing schools and students" (Elmore, 2002a, p.4).

The aim of NCLB is to insure proficiency in reading and mathematics for all students at the national, state, and local level. The state plays a prominent role in the implementation of the NCLB policy as defined by Iowa's Accountability Plan. While levels of performance are defined by NCLB guidance as 100% proficiency for all students by 2014, the performance indicators are defined at the state level. The Iowa Test
of Basic Skills is the chosen indicator in Iowa with prescribed cut points that determine proficiency. For not reaching proficiency, consequences are mandated through a series of sanctions that compound year after year. While these sanctions are felt at both the district and building level, it is at the building level, where the sanctions are most severe and costly. This type of federally regulated, large-scale mandated accountability reform with sanctions for not meeting expectations is a new phenomenon for school leaders. With external interventions being applied proportionately to how well schools are demonstrating improvement in student performance, the school leadership is reflecting upon and proactively responding to what might be done internally to alter student outcomes. The results of the “new educational accountability” have led to assertive leadership strategies for the school leadership that include data-driven decision-making, a result-oriented approach to student learning, and a renewed interest in the importance of quality educators and teacher evaluation.

Interviews with seven school leaders who are implementing NCLB revealed inconsistencies between their stories and the current research of school leadership and educational reform. There is a marked difference between what these school leaders reported and what the current literature suggests. In contrast, the business-oriented literature seemed to align more closely and provide more guidance in the understanding of the behaviors demonstrated by the administrators interviewed. The findings from this study can best be discussed by considering Collin’s (2001) and Fullan’s (2003) descriptions of leadership and reform.
Research Questions Revisited

This study initiated an interest in the particular characteristics of leadership and the agent-principal relationship as school leaders negotiated the interests of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and the interests of the school buildings' designated as schools in need of assistance (SINA). The questions that began and guided this study remain relevant as a result of the data analysis:

1. How does the school leadership negotiate the interests of NCLB and the local school building?
2. How does the information flow of NCLB requirements influence the school leadership?
3. How does the public accountability system of NCLB influence the school leadership?

Results

The seven principals in this study were all school leaders at the building or district level for schools designated in need of assistance. A series of one-on-one interviews were analyzed over a period of six months. Findings are organized around the three interactive patterns of contemporary agency theory: conflicting goals and objectives, asymmetry of information, and control and monitoring with the additional category of leadership. Findings from across the three interview sites included the following: 1) A clear congruence of interests exists between the goals of NCLB and the goals of the school leaders, 2) the flow of information influences leadership, 3) the individual and external accountability influences leadership behavior, and, 4) the leadership style has
been influenced by the accountability system of NCLB. These themes led to a number of observations.

**Conflicting Goals and Objectives**

**Congruence of Interests**

In the area of congruence of interests, the seven school leaders across all three sites in the study:

- Believed their interests concerning student outcomes were congruent with those specified in the NCLB legislation;
- Believed their success in raising student achievement scores and the possibility of removal of the SINA label was due to the congruence of interests;
- Believed NCLB and the SINA designation were a welcomed intrusion upon their work;
- Believed NCLB and the SINA designation provided a spotlight on student achievement in buildings that have historically demonstrated poor results;
- Knew the student achievement gap exists and has existed for over a decade and that NCLB’s focus on closing that gap was consistent with the district goals;
- Recognized the challenge in all students reaching the prescribed level of proficiency as defined by NCLB;
- Accepted the challenge of NCLB with confidence and a “no excuses” mental model to demonstrate improvement in student achievement; and
- At Site B, some school leaders expressed reservations on the narrow focus of NCLB;
- Accepted responsibility and perceived the SINA designation as an opportunity to provide leadership.

**Asymmetry of Information**

**Influence of Information Flow on Leadership**

In the area of the influence of information flow on leadership, the seven school leaders across all three sites in the study:
Agreed that information is communicated through a hierarchical structure;

Believed that information is communicated effectively both internally and externally with the Superintendent responsible for the largest portion of the external communication;

Believed there is a positive relationship with the Iowa Department of Education, which is the regulatory agency; and

Knew that information asymmetry exists within the relationship of the school leaders and the Department.

**Control and Monitoring**

**Influence of Accountability on Leadership**

In the area of the influence of accountability on leadership, the seven school leaders across all three sites in the study:

- Knew that trust monitoring was necessary to assure the agents are performing in the best interests of the principal;
- Agreed that the need to monitor implementation and results was critical to their work;
- Knew internal and external accountability has facilitated a data-driven decision vision;
- Used data prior to the SINA designation, but NCLB expanded data collection;
- Knew achieving the desired results required quality educators in every classroom;
- Focused on teacher accountability based upon the criteria of the Iowa Teaching Standards;
- Knew the mobility of teachers within the district must be reviewed to achieve the desired results;
- Agreed to begin conversations with the union on the negotiation of contract language;
- Believed that incentives will be helpful in retaining and recruiting teachers to work in the more challenging buildings;
- Believed that teacher expectations must be high for all students;
- Believed public accountability is an asset to public education not a deficit.
Leadership

Influence of NCLB on Leadership Style

In the area of the influence of NCLB on leadership style, the seven school leaders across all three sites in the study:

- Recognized their leadership style has become more assertive and more centralized;
- Recognized the student achievement needs and were willing to take risks to accomplish their goals;
- Believed that programs not directly tied to student achievement must be considered for the value added qualities to the learning experience;
- Believed external mandates will initiate change more swiftly than internal change processes;
- Believed the authority granted through the NCLB legislation provided the opportunity to make changes that everyone knew needed to occur;
- Knew the political climate would not allow initiatives necessary to improve student outcomes without the authority granted through the legislation; and
- Believed a loss of autonomy was a fair trade-off for improving student outcomes.

Results and Prior Research

NCLB challenges the public school system to bring all students to a level of proficiency by 2014. If school leadership is going to be successful in moving all students to a level of proficiency in reading and mathematics, leadership practices and characteristics must be considered. The educational leadership literature would suggest that internal accountability must precede external accountability with a clear set of expectations that define quality schools before external forces can be used internally to improve student learning (Fullan, 2001b). Improving schools is driven by the beliefs,
norms, expectations, and practices that are shared by the people within the system, not information regarding their performance. A poor school does not improve with more information but through a shared vision for a quality school (Fullan, 2001b). If it is assumed that the locus of control for improving schools is outside of the organization, the highest adaptation for planning will be survival, and those within the organization will find a sense of hopelessness and despair (Cook, 2004). The leadership will suffer a loss of autonomy that will prohibit authentic leadership, and as a result, authentic followership will be unable to emerge (Sergiovanni, 2000). Yet, the school leaders interviewed for this research did not report such practices or characteristics. Rather than creating a shared vision for a quality school, these leaders adopted a non-democratic, assertive leadership style to meet the challenges of NCLB. NCLB demands a change in the status quo of schooling, and as such, a change in leadership practices requires consideration.

Collin's (2001) suggests:

We don’t have great schools, principally because we have good schools. We don’t have great government, principally because we have good government. Few people attain great lives, in large part because it is just so easy to settle for a good life. The vast majority of companies never become great, precisely because the vast majority become quite good, and this is the main problem (2001, p.2).

For these school leaders, NCLB makes it difficult to “settle” for the status quo and requires leadership practices more consistent with organizational and business literature than with the educational leadership literature.

Little in the educational literature addresses what is necessary to achieve greatness in a results-oriented public educational system. Yet, this is exactly what NCLB is promulgating, a result-oriented system producing unprecedented student achievement. American businesses have a history of results-orientation accountability for improving
profits and market share. The history reflected in the business literature provides an opportunity to study organizations that have achieved greatness with possible insights for education.

Over a period of five years, Collins (2001) and his research team studied companies that have made the switch from good to great. Collins raised the question: “Can a good company become a great company, and if so how? Or is the disease of ‘just being good’ incurable?” (2001, p.3). The answer to his question was that companies evolved from good to great. A five-year study of fifteen companies confirmed the transformation and described the leadership necessary to create and sustain such change. With NCLB, public education is being asked to do the same. School leaders are being asked to facilitate and sustain an unequaled student achievement movement. The business and organizational literature might provide timely insights into the leadership characteristics necessary to create and sustain “great” schools.

Collin’s (2001) studied 11 companies which changed from good to great and sustained that level for a minimum of 15 years. The results identified leadership capabilities that were evidenced at the time of transition. Collin’s hierarchy describes five levels of executive capabilities identified in the team’s research.

Level 5: Executive
Builds enduring greatness through a paradoxical blend of personal humility and professional will.

Level 4: Effective Leader
Catalyzes commitment to and vigorous pursuit of a clear and compelling vision, stimulating higher performance standards.
Level 3: Competent Manager
Organizes people and resources toward the effective and efficient pursuit of predetermined objectives.

Level 2: Contributing Team Member
Contributes individual capabilities to the achievement of group objectives and works effectively with others in a group setting.

Level 1: High Capable Individual
Makes productive contribution through talent, knowledge, skills, and good work habits (Collins, 2001, p. 20).

Regardless of whether the company was consumer or industrial, in crisis or a steady state, offered services or products, large or small, without exception, all of the good-to-great companies had Level 5 leadership at the time of their transformation. In addition, the absence of Level 5 leadership was a consistent pattern in the companies that could not make the transition from good-to-great (Collins, 2001).

Level 5 leadership involved disciplined people, disciplined thought, and disciplined action. The right people, disciplined people, are the most important asset to an organization. If the right people are on the bus, they will be self-motivated. They will do everything in their power to build a great organization because they cannot imagine settling for anything less. Excellence is built for its own sake. The role of leadership is not to de-motivate people but to value disciplined people. With disciplined thought, an organization is able to confront the brutal facts and believe it will prevail. An honest confrontation of the situation is necessary to make good decisions. When the truth about the situation is known, the right decisions often become self-evident. The organization
must also have a culture of disciplined action where the leadership asks questions and
does not provide answers, where dialogue and debate are the norm, not coercion, where
autopsies are conducted without blame, and where red flag mechanisms are built so the
truth is unavoidable. These four basic practices invite the truth to be heard and a culture
of discipline to be created. Finally, technology is never a primary means of
transformation but a tool (Collins, 2001).

Collin’s Level 5 hierarchy is worth consideration as a litmus test for school
leadership. According to Fullan (2003):

Collins’s research is essentially a story of passion, focus, inquiry, and action-
collectively pursued... Be that as it may, Collins’s findings about leadership are
germane to our interest in what it would take to develop great schools. Put
another way, think of Collins’s core concepts in the services of the moral
imperative (2003, p.8).

As public education is challenged to transition from good to great, several conclusions
from Collin’s research are relevant. He suggested that once a company is satisfied to be
good, it eliminates the possibility of greatness. The same may hold true for public
education:

That good is the enemy of great is not just a business problem but a human
problem. If we have cracked the code on the question of good to great, we should
have something of value to any type of organization. Good schools might become

Great schools may be needed to meet the requirements of NCLB, and Level 5 leadership
may be required from our school leaders.

Fullan (2003) acknowledges the leaders needed to create great schools are more
of a chief operating officer than a manager who creates a culture of discipline where
teachers are immersed in informed professional inquiry and take action that results in
increased student learning. According to Fullan (2003), there is no greater moral
imperative than to rethink the principal's role as part of changing the context for teacher and student learning. Rethinking the role of school leadership necessitates defining the characteristics that will be most beneficial in creating great schools. Collin's work can provide the guidance necessary to reflect upon school leadership for great schools.

Level 5 leaders are ambitious but not for themselves (Collins, 2001). They are ambitious for the company's success. Their eye is on the future success of the organization and the next generation. These individuals blend personal humility with intense professional will. Level 5 leadership is not just about personal humility or selfless, a servant style of leadership, but it is also about a ferocious resolve with stoic determination to do whatever is takes to create a great company. Level 5 leaders are fanatically driven to produce results (Collins, 2001). Doing whatever it takes involves leading others through deep cultural changes that is focused and mobilizes the passions and commitments of teachers, parents, and others to improve learning for all students through a closing of the student achievement gap (Fullan, 2003). Authentic leadership practices anchored to values and commitments will advance the enterprises they lead. These leaders display character (Sergiovanni, 2000).

The seven school leaders interviewed were ambitious for the school's improvement and removal from the SINA designation. Their eyes were on the future status of their school, anxious to erase a history of poor student achievement. The administrators spoke of doing whatever it takes to raise student achievement. Yet, they recognized and credited a collaborative effort for any success they have accomplished. Understanding the need to achieve different results, these administrators challenged the status quo and reported an intense professional will to achieve results. They viewed
NCLB as an opportunity to lead the school through substantive changes. They valued improved student outcomes and initiated effort to improve.

Humble leaders view their leadership as an awesome responsibility and a position of stewardship. They are focused on whether they are effectively meeting the needs of their people and do not worry about office politics (Hunter, 2004). The administrators interviewed clearly described this stewardship duty, but they also described an intense professional will to achieve different results. While these leaders are ambitious, their ambition is primarily to improve the learning opportunities in reading and mathematics for their students. Their humble stewardship and personal humility was evidence in the potential for moral hazard, which results from information asymmetry. The agent may pursue self-interests with disregard for the influence they may have on the principal’s goals. Yet, with a congruence of interests, the agent does not pursue self-interests. The agent’s interests are served as well. This inquiry evidenced no occurrence of moral hazard because of the principal-agent relationship, attesting to the personal humility and humble stewardship of these leaders.

These leaders also expressed a personal humility required to achieve the goals of NCLB. Congruence of interests between the legislation and the interests of the school building necessitates a relinquishment of autonomy. The federal legislation prescribes the goals, the times, and the consequences. Importantly, the school leadership literature points out that autonomy is critical for school organizations and their leadership. Without it, promises cannot be kept and frustration and cynicism are the only possible results (Cook, 2004). Autonomy is a critical element of authentic leadership. Without autonomy, there can be no authentic leadership and character will be lost. Authentic
leadership requires autonomy to actually decide important things (Sergiovanni, 2000). The literature on school choice and local control stresses the need to reduce the bureaucratic interference if the community is going to gain access to educational opportunities, and in fact, the bureaucratization actually inhibits the ability of schools to effectively and autonomously meet the needs of their communities (Gordon, 1995; Chubb & Moe, 1990). The results of this study did not support that body of literature.

The school leaders interviewed either did not believe autonomy was essential or did not perceive their position to be autonomous. As such, they did not perceive a loss of autonomy and expressed the autonomy did not exist. They referenced the organizational hierarchy of public schools and the lack of autonomy that was inherent in the structure. In fact, some stated that autonomy had a negative influence on schools as it created opportunities for a lack of consistency for curriculum implementation and grading practices. The autonomy does not exist.

School personnel are conditioned to depend on external authorities, which have always described what a school can and cannot do (Glickman, 1993). Authority derived from the state or in this case the federal government is embedded in formal leadership positions as a vital dimension. Once used to enable control and command behavior, external authority has empowered school leaders. Leadership can now use granted authority to facilitate the process of building capacity and distributing leadership across the system (Lambert, 2003). The school leaders interviewed discussed the need to build capacity among the teachers and empower the teachers to become more active participants in the results-oriented approach. The message was clear that only through a
collaborative effort would the school reach the goals of NCLB and remove themselves from the SINA designation.

Level 5 leaders display an insatiable need for sustained results (Collins, 2001). They display a workman like diligence: more plow horse than show horse. A results-orientation is critical for Level 5 leadership (Collins, 2001). For public educators, accountability has become a dirty word. Yet, accountability may lead the way in a fundamental reformulation of educational accountability (Reeves, 2004). The seven administrators interviewed are taking the lead in a fundamental reconsideration of student-centered accountability. They have a need to achieve different results that demonstrate gains in student achievement and have seized this opportunity to take advantage of a result-oriented system that expects and celebrates student achievement. They are plowing forward to improve in student achievement. As Reeves (2004) acknowledged:

A number of school systems have seized the opportunity to transform their accountability systems, to recognize teachers as integral parts of constructive accountability, and to use their systems to provide positive and meaningful feedback throughout the year for teachers, students, and administrators. These districts have the same political constraints, financial limits, union agreements, and human frailties as their counterparts throughout the world. But they have nevertheless taken advantage of the opportunity to make “accountability” a word that allows teachers to showcase their professionalism rather than cringe in horror (p. 57).

These school leaders do not believe “accountability” is a bad word. With a data-driven vision, the school leaders have worked diligently to seek different results for their students. NCLB has provided an opportunity for administrators to achieve the necessary results.
While the vestige of site-based management lingers in the literature as the “appropriate” methodology to pursue change, these school leaders chose a more assertive, non-democratic style of leadership. Consensual vision requires time. Time is a finite resource for these administrators. With change that must occur rapidly, the schools leaders reflect a non-democratic assertiveness to achieve the goals of NCLB by necessity. They are acutely aware of those closest to the classroom having the greatest influence on student learning. Teacher quality has been a priority as a means to affect change. Willingly they attribute their success to others while bearing sole responsibility for any barriers that would impede their success. This pattern is called “the window and the mirror”. Those on the outside credit the Level 5 leader for their success while the Level 5 leaders credit the great people who have made the success possible (Collins, 2001).

Critical to achieving the desired results is the alignment of their staff members’ talents to the needs of the district. Collins (2001) acknowledges that without the right people in the right seats on the right bus there is no need to determine the destination. Great vision requires great people. The right people do not have to be tightly managed or motivated. They will be self-motivated through an inner-drive to produce results to be part of something great. Educational change depends on what teachers do in the classrooms. It is that simple. It would be easy to legislate changes in thinking and practices; however, it is necessary to recruit quality people and provide a learning community that energizes teachers and rewards their accomplishments (Fullan, 2001a).

Without exception, the administrators that participated in this inquiry were acutely aware of this connection. A need to recruit and retain quality teachers has been
an issue, especially for the SINAs. These are difficult school buildings. Teacher mobility within the district is a consideration. The persistently noted correlation between high-test scores and teacher quality may be a function of the traditional way in which teacher assignments are made within a district. The least qualified and least experienced teacher is assigned to the lowest performing students in the lowest performing schools. With no malice intent, the message is clearly that experienced, quality educators are rewarded for their service through contact with economically advantaged students who share their Anglo heritage (Reeves, 2004).

Dialogue has begun with the union to renegotiate contract language avoiding the high mobility among staff members. Incentives are being discussed as a way to reward teachers who are working in the more difficult buildings to keep the most qualified teachers with the neediest students. Incentives are designed to get the right people on the bus not to get the right behaviors from the wrong people (Collins, 2001). Finally, teachers are being counseled out of the profession or asked to resign if their skills are not a match for the students they serve. As Assistant Principal Jones stated:

Before teachers were content to stay in a place where they weren’t exactly happy, and administrators were just happy to have a body, to have someone there. With this model, you can say to a veteran teacher you are not meeting standards. The expectations are that you’re doing these things and you’re doing these things.

These school leaders clearly recognize their success or failure is contingent upon the quality of their staff. The ultimate resolution to the challenge of equitable teacher assignments is a combination of revisiting contract language with the teacher bargaining units and positive incentives that prompt experienced, qualified teachers to choose to serve the most challenging students (Reeves, 2004). To be successful, these school
leaders have no other option but to guarantee that they have the right people in the right seats on the right bus.

Level 5 leaders confront the brutal reality yet never lose faith (Collins, 2001). Four basic practices are evident: lead with questions, not answers; engage in dialogue and debate, not coercion; conduct autopsies without blame, and build red flag mechanisms that turn information into information that cannot be ignored (Collins, 2001). This inquiry found that schools leaders vehemently confronted the brutal reality of their student achievement scores. Questions were raised about school practices and their contribution to student achievement. A conducted autopsy indicated a history of low student achievement, particularly for certain sub groups. Yet, the administrators did not place blame. Once the information of poor student performance was public, the reality could not be ignored. Summative data was not timely enough to improve student learning. A process for formative data collection was initiated. Dialogue occurred in the building level teams to discuss and analyze the data and to seek solutions that might alter the trend in poor student achievement. The administrators have faith that student achievement will improve.

While engaged in a dialogue to seek solutions, these school leaders were not involved in a debate about the vision or goals. The vision was clear, prescribed by NCLB, with no need to reach consensus. At this point, a discussion concerning the unique collaborative relationships within this organization structure is warranted. There was clearly a collaborative partnership between the school leaders and the Iowa Department of Education. The school leaders described a “partnership” necessary to achieve their goals. A collaborative relationship with teachers was also reported by the
administrators in their efforts to meet the challenges of NCLB. The school leaders expressed a need to work together and to provide support to their teachers if they were going to be successful in reading the goals of NCLB. Without question, there was no collaborative style of leadership necessary to describe the vision for their efforts to improve student achievement results. An assertive, non-democratic style of leadership was evidenced to meet the challenges of NCLB. Assertive or top down leadership may persist under two conditions: in situations where it leaders have a good idea and when assertive initiation is combined with empowerment and choices as the process unfolds (Fullan, 2001a). The leadership believed it was a good idea to align their building interests with the interests of NCLB. The implementation of this idea was a collaborative effort. Although the requirements for improving student achievement were mandated, once recognized, the staff worked collaboratively. Student achievement data were being shared internally and externally. The administrators were taking aggressive actions to arrest the past achievement data and demonstrate improvement in student outcomes. As Hunter (2004) acknowledges:

> Servant leadership does not allow one to abdicate his or her leadership responsibility to define the mission, set the rules governing behavior, set standards, and define accountability. The servant leader does not commission a poll, conduct a committee meeting, or have a democratic vote to determine the answers to these questions. Indeed, people look to the leader to provide this direction (2004, p.31).

With the authority granted through the NCLB legislation and the data to support the recommendations, a more assertive leadership style was necessary according to the seven school leaders that participated in this inquiry. While not coercive, this leadership style
was assertive and top down. Such a style was necessary to respond to the NCLB requirements. However, if the change is to be sustained, it will depend upon activating the ideas and intrinsic motivation of the staff members to develop an internal commitment as participants in this change process (Fullan, 2001a).

These seven “servant” leaders are confronting the brutal reality aggressively by providing direction with faith that they will prevail. Instituting a data-driven vision with a results-oriented approach, holding themselves as well as teachers responsible for student outcomes, questioning practices not directly related to student achievement, moving ahead with a non-democratic leadership style, and accessing the authority granted through NCLB to move swiftly in affecting change, these administrators have actively responded to the reality of their poor student performance believing they can meet the challenge.

Level 5 leaders transcend competence to discover the core business that will lead to greatness (Collins, 2001). The good to great companies are like hedgehogs. They are simple dowdy creatures that know one thing and stick to it. Normally, it takes about four years to get a “hedgehog concept”. The hedgehog concept is defined by the understanding of what an organization can be the best at doing, what the organization is passionate about achieving, and what drives the economic engine of the organization (Collins, 2001). Public education is a social institution that is a microcosm of the community it serves. The roles and responsibilities are complex with many diverse expectations. Academic success is more likely achieved if the curriculum is narrowly focused and common for all, assessments are authentic and linked to purposes, standards
are explicit and public, and students are encouraged to do their best to meet expectations (Sergiovanni, 2000).

Conversation with those interviewed alluded to the role of public education and the demands upon the system. The administrators discussed the renewed academic focus, the need for curriculum consistency within the school building and across the district, and the steps necessary to move in that direction. Clear articulation of the role of public education for the school buildings, district, and community has not yet occurred. However, NCLB defines the "crystalline concept" (Collins, 2001) for public education as student proficiency in reading, mathematics, and soon, science. There is concern from School B that a narrowing of the focus for public education may not be in the best interest of students. As of yet, these school leaders do not have a clear vision that guides all of the work, the school leaders find themselves trying to be everything to everybody. The role of public education is ambiguous for these school leaders. Yet, NCLB has begun to define, in part, the "crystalline concept" (Collins, 2001), and the leadership is most definitely moving in a direction to seek more clarity of purpose and vision.

Level 5 leaders create a culture of discipline, which starts with disciplined people (Collins, 2001). The transition to great begins not with disciplining the wrong people into the right behaviors, but by having the disciplined people on the bus in the first place. Disciplined people are able to confront the brutal facts while retaining resolute faith that success can be created. Most important, discipline must persist until the crystalline concept or the hedgehog concepts have been fully defined (Collins, 2001). Again, the seven administrators interviewed for this inquiry are working to develop that culture of
discipline with the disciplined people in the right seats on the right bus. For school leadership, this can be particularly challenging and critical:

As principals seek to initiate change in their buildings, not everyone is necessarily affirmed, nor is everyone afforded a similar voice in shaping the vision of reform. Teachers who are unwilling to take on the hard work of change and align with colleagues around a common reform agenda must leave. Only when participants demonstrate their commitment to engage in such work and see others doing the same can a genuine professional community grounded in relational trust emerge. Principals must take the lead and extend themselves by reaching out to others. On occasion, principals may be called on to demonstrate trust in colleagues who may not fully reciprocate, at least initially. But, they must also be prepared to use coercive power to reform a dysfunctional school community around professional norms. Interestingly, such authority may rarely need to be invoked thereafter once these new norms are firmly established (Bryk & Schneider, 2002, p. 138).

These ideas run congruent with Collin's (2001) conclusions: Get the right people on board, confront the brutal facts, and establish a culture of disciple in which doing the right thing is part of the culture. These are difficult propositions for public schools but do not contradict their importance or necessity (Fullan, 2001a). Uncertainty exists as to the "crystalline concept" that defines the role of public education for the Urban Community School. Clarity of purpose and direction continues to evolve for these educators. They will not have efforts compromised in reaching the goals of NCLB. There will be "no excuses" for poor student performance or a lack of ownership in the learning process. The leadership has prescribed the direction for their school building and is not concerned with staff consensus. They are moving forward toward achieving the goals of improved student performance as they are very clear about their passion and what drives their "economic" engine. For these seven administrators, it is always and every day their passion for their students and learning.
Conclusions

The job of the researcher is to describe the truth, as those studied perceive it. The privilege of the researcher is also to draw some conclusions about the data. After coming to an understanding of the experiences of those involved in this study and considering the literature of agency theory, school reform, and leadership, several conclusions may be offered. At the time of this inquiry, the stories of seven different school leaders from two different school buildings designated in need of assistance were captured. In the history of public education, the accountability of NCLB is unlike anything previously experienced. The seven school leaders are facing an extraordinary challenge. It is imperative that the role of school leadership as influenced by the implementation of externally mandated policy is studied and analyzed.

These school leaders believe the NCLB legislation and the designation of SINA was an opportunity to initiate change that was necessary and long over due. Administrators were not required to negotiate the interests of their buildings and NCLB, as those interests aligned. The federal mandate was an intrusion, but it was a welcomed intrusion on their work since achieving universal proficiency in reading and mathematics was an unfulfilled goal of these school leaders before NCLB. NCLB requires all students in grades 3-11 to be proficient in reading and mathematics by the year 2014. In the state of Iowa, proficiency is defined as the 41st percentile as measured by Iowa Test of Basic Skills and the Iowa Test of Education Development. Failure to meet the requirements of annual progress toward the goal for two years results in a SINA designation for the school building.
Important to the implementation of the requirements of NCLB was the congruence of interests between the school leaders, their buildings, and the legislation. The congruent interests included: an increase in student achievement for low performing students in reading and mathematics, especially certain subgroups that have demonstrated a lack in performance; the aggregation and disaggregation of data to inform their decision-making process; the results-oriented approach to student learning; the need for quality educators in all classrooms; and the public disclosure of student achievement results. For these reasons, the building level leaders moved quickly to create the infrastructure that would support the necessary conditions for the successful implementation of NCLB.

The seven school leaders in this inquiry were well aware of the unique challenges of NCLB. They understood that certain subgroups would find it difficult to meet the necessary proficiency requirements in the specified timelines. However, they were also aware that some students in their buildings had demonstrated poor student performance for years. Understanding that high performing schools might find this legislation intrusive, the leadership of these poor performing schools perceived the legislation to be an impetus for change. The authority granted through the legislation allowed changes to occur that would have been traditionally circumvented by the school board and the interests of various stakeholder groups. To demand that financial and human resources be distributed to the neediest schools would have been impossible for these administrators prior to NCLB. With over a decade of poor student performance for certain sub groups, externally driven mandatory change was necessary to alter the historical trend of student achievement in these two buildings. Without the legislation,
the school leadership reported they would not have had the necessary authority to move ahead with the work they needed to accomplish.

Accessing the authority of the legislation minimizes the autonomy of the school leaders. For the seven school leaders that participated in this inquiry, autonomy of their position was not essential. They revealed that autonomy did not truly exist in the role of school leaders prior to NCLB. As Cook acknowledges, “Autonomous literally translates as ‘self-ruling.’ There can be no degree or quality to autonomy, an organization is either autonomous or it is not.” Against this description, no autonomy exists in these school buildings. Yet, the need for autonomous leadership is pervasive in the educational leadership literature (Cook, 2004; Fullan, 2003; Sergiovanni, 2000). As Fullan (2001a) suggests, top-down leadership may persist under two considerations: when leaders have a good idea and when the initiative is combined with empowerment and choice. For these leaders, NCLB is the good idea that has given them authority to initiate change in student outcomes. Autonomy is less important than authority to increase student achievement.

NCLB required these school leaders to adopt several qualities of Collin’s (2001) Level 5 leadership. They have confronted the brutal reality of their poor performing students and have begun to evaluate if they have the right teacher in the right seat and on the right bus. The leadership has a need for results and has promulgated a data-driven vision with a results-oriented approach for their school buildings. Yet, the administrators have begun to question one core concept of public education, “Schools are social institutions. We do a lot more than academics here.” (Assistant Principal Trent), to reach a “crystalline concept of their purpose as a public institution: “We do enough with that which is impossible for people to think it’s possible, and then we get blamed for not
doing the impossible. And it's hard to do, nobody else would even attempt it” (Principal Ronald Johnson). The administrator’s “crystalline concept” has been defined for them and they embrace it: student proficiency in reading and math. NCLB is beginning to define what public education can be good at doing and what is out of their locus of control. Finally, they are very clear about their passion. It is students and learning. These administrators believe they can meet the challenge of NCLB.

The seven school leaders that provided leadership for the two schools designated in need of assistance demonstrated a high sense of responsibility for the school buildings they serve to the point of suggesting that if they could not achieve the desired results it would be appropriate to find others to fill their positions. Coming to terms with a history of poor student achievement, using data to inform decisions, considering the quality of teachers serving students, and creating the conditions for successful learning for teachers and students are examples of the actions taken by these school leaders to create a momentum for change. With a non-democratic leadership style, they will move quickly and assertively to improve student learning to meet the demands of NCLB.

Implications

The seven school leaders from two school buildings and central administration may not be representative of all building level leaders responsible for the success of schools in need of assistance. The implications that follow are based only on the findings of this study. They represent reflections on the combination of the study’s conclusions, the current literature base, and personal experiences.
If the public educational system is really prepared to get serious about the rhetoric in the educational leadership literature, it begs the question about the role of the school principal. Right now, that role is complex:

Wanted: A miracle worker who can do more with less, pacify rival groups, endure chronic second-guessing, tolerate low levels of support, process large volumes of paper and work double shifts (65 nights a year). He or she will have Carte Blanca to innovate, but cannot spend much money, replace any personnel, or upset constituency (Evans, 2001).

From this perspective, the role of the school principal must be re-examined to allow the leadership to facilitate improvement in poor performing schools.

This leadership will need the authority to make the decisions necessary to insure minimal student performance without repercussions from the community or school board. A greater degree of discretion must be afforded school principals to allocate resources, both financial and human. Teaching positions will not be guaranteed for life regardless of performance. School principals must have the authority to recruit and retain teachers that will best meet his or her students’ needs and assure success for all students. At the district level, additional resources must be allocated to aggressively recruit, develop, and retain school principals for the low performing schools. Building level leaders will be accountable to their staff, community, parents, and most important, their students. A combination of “crystalline concept”, authority, and resources would enable school leadership to create the changes required for students in our neediest school buildings.

As this study was specific to NCLB and the leadership in school buildings designated SINA, additional recommendations could be extended to policy makers and influential constituents. The re-examined role of the school administrator calls for greater discretion in the allocation of financial and human resources. Collins (2001)
would suggest that leadership must have the ability and authority to get the right people on the bus and the wrong people off the bus. Fullan (2003) would agree that if public education were going to transform itself principals must be cast and carry the authority of chief-operating officers in the school building. Considering the future of public education and the policies that will influence that system, a flexible response is warranted. The intent of NCLB is for all students to be proficient in reading and mathematics. However, components of the guidance and regulations will make that challenging, if not impossible for school leaders given the time period restrictions and the assessment requirements.

Supporting implementation in the resource allocation, in capacity-building measures, and in the decision-making process would enhance the possible success of the reform. The public has a right to know how well our public schools are doing, and it is essential that educators not let themselves off the hook when it comes to ensuring equity and excellence in schools, but politicians cannot be let off the hook either. They must provide commitment and resources necessary to do something authentic about closing the achievement gap (Sirotnik, 2002). The assumption underlying NCLB and the SINA designation is that building level leaders and teachers know what to do to improve student performance and have chosen not to do it (Elmore, 2002b). That assumption would be incongruent with the school leaders who participated in this study. Before NCLB, the leaders lacked the political authority and resources to implement change and improve student performance. Providing the necessary resources to build capacity among the administrators involved in the implementation of the policy is essential to aggressively alter the academic development of their students.
NCLB and its implementation have raised the question about the purpose of public education as evidenced by the administrators interviewed for this study. To meet the requirements of NCLB, the purpose of schools must become narrow and focused around student achievement. The social implications of public education could be lost to accountability reform that is predicated on competition and teaching to the test. Public entities that remake themselves in the image of private entities only serve to view children as “investments” (whose ultimate beneficiary is business) and a market-driven credentialism in which competition drives individual distinctions (Kohn, 2004). Only the “strong” schools are intended to survive. If it is believed that public education is more about student learning and preparing its children to fully participate in a democratic society, school personnel must share a coherent vision with an explicit set of norms that defines what a good school looks like before they can use the signals from the outside to improve student learning. The internal accountability must precede the external accountability (Elmore, 2002b). With NCLB, there is no internal accountability. NCLB is driven by external accountability that defines quality schools through a process of market-driven credentialism (Kohn, 2004). Some believe this market-oriented credentialing process is intended to privatize public education (Bracey, 2003). A critical examination of the consequences of NCLB for public education would be worth further exploration.

The unsuccessful implementation of NCLB leads to sanctions that have the possibility of public schools being managed by the state or other outside agencies. Considering the implications of the compounding sanctions of the NCLB legislation is
necessary. While the sanctions have been articulated, no school building has institutionalized all of the requirements. As Elmore (2002b) acknowledged:

One consequence of leaving decisions about content and performance to states and localities for so long is that they never developed the institutional capacity to monitor the improvement of teaching and learning schools, to support the development of new knowledge and skill in teachers and administrators, and to develop measures of performance that are useful to educators and the public.... The prognosis is not good. The best we can hope for is that the capacity problems of state and localities will become more visible as a political issue at the state and federal levels, triggering responses that will help schools overcome the obstacles they face in improving the quality and intensity of teaching and learning.

The impact of this level of federal and state intrusion on school leadership is unknown. Whether, these sanctions will help schools overcome their obstacles or undermine the educational professionals remains to be seen.

Finally, the preparation of our principals for these leadership roles must be considered. Pre-service programs may be challenged to support and prepare administrators for leading this change process. NCLB and its implementation are concluded with all students being proficient by 2014. Leadership must be fully prepared to respond to the NCLB legislation. Skills in the successful facilitation of mandated change may be necessary, as well as, the ability to use leadership power to coerce a dysfunctional school community around professional norms (Bryk & Schneider, 2002). They will need the skills of a chief operating officer, such as the capacity to create professional learning communities where action is taken to improve results (Fullan, 2003), and to use granted authority as an opportunity to empower, build capacity, and distribute leadership (Lambert, 2003). The preparation for administrators providing leadership in this scenario is worth considering further.
Suggestions for Further Research

This study attempted to describe the influence on leadership of NCLB and the SINA designation for seven school leaders for two school buildings in an urban school district. Several suggestions for future research may be offered. The role of agency theory as a rational explanation for behavior of individuals placed in the principal-agent relationship provided a useful lens to examine the response of school leaders to the NCLB mandate. An analysis of the “principal’s” perception regarding the impact of NCLB could be explored in future research with the United States Department of Education as the “principal” and the Iowa Department of Education as the “agent” or with the lens of the administrators as the “principals” and the teachers as the “agents”.

Limitations of the theoretical framework that would be worthy of future consideration would be the “impossibility” of “all” students reaching the proficiency and participation expectations of NCLB. The participants mentioned the length of time necessary to move all students to proficiency as part of their challenge. Further study might explore perceptions concerning the reasonableness of the existing timelines for reaching proficiency. In addition, a few participants addressed the limitations of the Iowa Test of Basic Skills and the Iowa Test of Educational Development as the sole means to measure proficiency. Further study might examine a broader representation of school administrators and their views on this measure of proficiency. A comment was also shared that with finite resources and the requirements of NCLB to lift up those who are not proficient, fewer resources may be available to students who are or exceed minimal proficiency. The allocation of resources and the need to examine funding formulas that provide a balance that meets both district and all students’ needs and their influence on
teachers and students is an opportunity for future research (Baker, 2004). In addition, the limitations of the Iowa Test of Basic Skills and the Iowa Test of Educational Development as the sole means to measure proficiency is worth consideration. Chubb and Moe's (2003) research on market-oriented reform, the credentialing of public schools and the influence of politics on public education might provide insights into the influence of NCLB on public education. Consideration might be given to Hall and Hord's (2001) Stages of Concern or Cuban's (2000) research on why it is so difficult to define "good" schools. Future research exploring diverse conceptual and theoretical frameworks in interpreting the impact of NCLB is worth considering as an opportunity for sense making. As schools continue to implement NCLB, a variety of conceptual theories may be useful in examining the impact of the legislation on school leaders, teachers, and students.

Finally, the leadership qualities that Collins (2001), Fullan (2003), and Hunter (2004) have addressed in the leadership literature provided insight into the type of leadership characteristics that would be most influential in the improvement of low performing schools. Further research with school administrators could determine if the Level 5 leadership is really wanted or needed in public education and if a Level 5 leader is essential in achieving the goals of NCLB. The issue of authority versus autonomy would be especially informative. On the cutting edge of the implementation of NCLB, these leaders and schools could provide interesting following up and learnings. Such insights could prove invaluable as NCLB enters its fourth year of implementation.
REFERENCES


### Level One Coding: Initial Codes for First Interview with Principal Richard Smith

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APPENDIX D
Iowa Teaching Standards and Model Criteria
Adopted by the State Board of Education
5/10/02

Standard 1

Demonstrates ability to enhance academic performance and support for implementation of the school district’s student achievement goals.

Model Criteria

The teacher:
  a. Provides evidence of student learning to students, families, and staff.
  b. Implements strategies supporting student, building, and district goals.
  c. Uses student performance data as a guide for decision making.
  d. Accepts and demonstrates responsibility for creating a classroom culture that supports the learning of every student.
  e. Creates an environment of mutual respect, rapport, and fairness.
  f. Participates in and contributes to a school culture that focuses on improved student learning.
  g. Communicates with students, families, colleagues, and communities effectively and accurately.

Standard 2

Demonstrates competence in content knowledge appropriate to the teaching position.

Model Criteria

The teacher:
  a. Understands and uses key concepts, underlying themes, relationships, and different perspectives related to the content area.
  b. Uses knowledge of student development to make learning experiences in the content area meaningful and accessible for every student.
  c. Relates ideas and information within and across content areas.
  d. Understands and uses instructional strategies that are appropriate to the content area.

Standard 3
Demonstrates competence in planning and preparing for instruction.

Model Criteria

The teacher:

a. Uses student achievement data, local standards, and the district curriculum in planning for instruction.

b. Sets and communicates high expectations for social, behavioral, and academic success of all students.

c. Uses student’s developmental needs, backgrounds, and interests in planning for instruction.

d. Selects strategies to engage all students in learning.

e. Uses available resources, including technologies, in the development and sequencing of instruction.

Standard 4
Uses strategies to deliver instruction that meets the multiple learning needs of students.

Model Criteria

The teacher:

a. Aligns classroom instruction with local standards and district curriculum.

b. Uses research-based instructional strategies that address the full range of cognitive levels.

c. Demonstrates flexibility and responsiveness in adjusting instruction to meet student needs.

d. Engages students in varied experiences that meet diverse needs and promote social, emotional, and academic growth.

e. Connects students’ prior knowledge, life experiences, and interests in the instructional process.

f. Uses available resources, including technologies, in the delivery of instruction.

Standard 5
Uses a variety of methods to monitor student learning.

Model Criteria

The teacher:

a. Aligns classroom assessment with instruction.

b. Communicates assessment criteria and standards to all students and parents.

c. Understands and uses the results of multiple assessments to guide planning and instruction.

d. Guides students in goal setting and assessing their own learning.
c. Provides substantive, timely, and constructive feedback to students and parents.

f. Works with other staff and building and district leadership in analysis of student progress.

**Standard 6**  
**Demonstrates competence in classroom management.**

**Model Criteria**

The teacher:

a. Creates a learning community that encourages positive social interaction, active engagement, and self-regulation for every student.

b. Establishes, communicates, models, and maintains standards of responsible student behavior.

c. Develops and implements classroom procedures and routines that support high expectations for student learning.

d. Uses instructional time effectively to maximize student achievement.

e. Creates a safe and purposeful learning environment.

**Standard 7**  
**Engages in professional growth.**

**Model Criteria**

The teacher:

a. Demonstrates habits and skills of continuous inquiry and learning.

b. Works collaboratively to improve professional practice and student learning.

c. Applies research, knowledge, and skills from professional development opportunities to improve practice.

d. Establishes and implements professional development plans based upon the teacher’s needs aligned to the Iowa teaching standards and district/building student achievement goals.

**Standard 8**  
**Fulfills professional responsibilities established by the school district.**

**Model Criteria**

The teacher:

a. Adheres to board policies, district procedures, and contractual obligations.

b. Demonstrates professional and ethical conduct as defined by state law and district policy.

c. Contributes to efforts to achieve district and building goals.

d. Demonstrates an understanding of and respect for all learners and staff.
e. Collaborates with students, families, colleagues, and communities to enhance student learning.