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THE ROLE OF NEBRASKA PUBLIC ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS IN THE PREPARATION FOR STATE-WIDE TESTING: A MIXED METHODS STUDY

Carrie L. Kolar
University of Nebraska-Lincoln, ckolar@gips.org

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by

Carrie Kolar

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Carrie L. Kolar, Ed.D.

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Advisor: Jody C. Isernhagen

Assessment is used to determine whether students are meeting the goals of education. In Nebraska, the goals are measured through statewide testing to meet the requirements of No Child Left Behind. As the requirements of No Child Left Behind increase, this study described the strategies used by Nebraska public elementary school principals in an effort to improvement student achievement.

The researcher gathered literature in order to identify the role of the principal in the assessment process and found the focus to be on the preparation of the statewide testing but little on the role of the principal. The literature revealed research based strategies that positively impacted student achievement and this study sought to discover which of those strategies, including professional development and leadership, were being used by elementary principals in Nebraska through a web-based survey.

The results showed the strategies being used by Nebraska public elementary school principals included identification of essential state standards and the alignment of curriculum guides with the scope and sequence of the identified standards. Working collaboratively to analyze data, create instruction plans and differentiating to meet individual student needs were also strategies used to prepare for statewide testing. Public

elementary school principals in the state of Nebraska were encouraging ownership and teamwork among the staff to improve student achievement and are working to recruit highly qualified staff.

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Chapter 1

Overview

Introduction

Nebraska has joined the nation's schools in the testing focus promoted by No Child Left Behind. For the first time, elementary students' scores on standardized achievement tests are now measuring the quality of education in Nebraska. The principal's role involves leading and engaging teachers in the use of school-based test preparation strategies in an effort to meet the requirements of No Child Left Behind.

The purpose of this study was to examine the role of Nebraska public elementary school principals (configurations in Nebraska vary from grades K-4, K-5 and K-6) when preparing for statewide testing and the strategies used by principals to prepare students for statewide assessment. This study needed to be conducted, as there was increasing literature on the preparation of public elementary school students for standardized achievement tests. However, there was no existing research on the preparation of students for statewide testing and a gap existed in the body of knowledge. Nebraska was demonstrating growth and improvement according to the 2011-2012 State of Schools Report (Nebraska Department of Education, 2012a) and this study documented the strategies being used by principals in order to create growth and improvement.

Background of Study

"Teaching to the test" has become a concern for instructional leaders because of the narrowing of curriculum and the lack of focus on crucial skills like critical thinking or problem solving. Teaching to the test is not a successful strategy:

> Making students familiar with content standards is not the same as engaging in extensive practice using problems or tasks designed to mirror the format of a

specific test. The latter may result in spurious test-score gains and is not recommended by the panel. (Hamilton, Halverson, Jackson, Mandinach, Supovitz, & Wayman, 2009, p. 20)

To avoid the negative consequences of preparation for statewide testing, principals need a variety of strategies in order to choose the most effective strategies for their school. In 2008, the National Association of Elementary School Principals stated, "The urgency now for school leaders is to plan and implement high-quality staff development-school-wide as well as for individuals- and to create the kind of powerful professional learning that will transform teaching so that it increases learning for students" (p. 8).

Currently, classroom instructors are the focus of the literature that does exist on the preparation for statewide testing; not the instructional leader or principal. "Specifically, principals impact teacher and student performance through influencing the purposes and goals of the school, the school structure and social networks, the people, and the school culture" (Young, Fuller, Brewer, Carpenter, & Mansfield, 2007, p. 2). The researcher wanted to discovered the role of principals in the goal of proficiency on statewide assessment since school leadership has an impact on student achievement and staff development. Principals shape the culture of the organization and ultimately determine the direction for school improvement. Principals are responsible for leading staff toward proficiency and meeting the requirements of No Child Left Behind by requiring or engaging teachers in strategies that prove to be successful in their schools. Principals are focused on closing the achievement gap and improving learning for every student in the school; not only to meet requirements, but also to benefit the students. According to the National Association of Elementary School Principals (2008), principals that are focused on 21st Century learning commit to the following:

- ensure alignment of curriculum with district and school goals, standards, assessments and resources;
- invest in a technology-rich culture that connects learning to the global society;
- hire, retain and support high-quality teachers; and
- ensure rigorous, relevant and appropriate instruction for all students. (p. 58)

It is possible that Nebraska public elementary school principals are committed to the same four elements listed above but currently there was no evidence available to support the Nebraska focus. This study discovered the strategies being used in Nebraska public elementary schools and provided insight into the principal's role during the assessment process.

Statement of Problem

This study revealed the role of Nebraska public elementary school principals in preparing for the implementation of statewide testing and the strategies they used to prepare for statewide testing.

Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005) stated that school administrators do have an impact on student achievement (p. 7). Research indicated that behaviors exhibited by principals created a focused goal that when driven by data and student-learning results increased student achievement (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Fullan, 2008; Marzano & Simms, 2013; Reeves, 2010; Schmoker, 1999; Waters & Cameron, 2007). This study looked at the behaviors of Nebraska public elementary school principals and how they chose to impact student achievement.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to examine the role of Nebraska public elementary school principals when preparing for statewide testing and the strategies used by principals to prepare students for statewide assessment. The central question for this

study was: What is the role of Nebraska public elementary school principals

(grades K-5) in leading and engaging teachers in the use of preparation for state wide

testing?

Quantitative sub-questions for the study:

1. What are the primary strategies used by elementary principals in Nebraska
   public schools for preparing for standardized testing?

2. Has professional development been utilized by Nebraska elementary
   principals in order to assist teachers in the preparation for standardized
   testing? And if it has been used, what types of professional development?

3. What leadership plans have Nebraska Public Elementary Schools and/or their
   school districts implemented to prepare for standardized testing?

Qualitative sub-questions for the study:

1. Which of the strategies used by staff at your school to prepare for
   standardized testing were the most effective? Why? Least effective? Why?

2. Which types of professional development offered at your school to prepare for
   standardized testing were the most effective? Why? Least effective? Why?

3. Which types of leadership plans implemented by your school and/or district
   were the most effective? Why? Least effective? Why?

4. Who determines which strategies will be encouraged/required/offered in your
   school? And at the district level?

5. What data is available supporting the successful use of the strategies at your
   school? And at the district level?

Key Terms

The following terms were provided to ensure uniformity throughout the study:

Standardized test—Tests given in a consistent manner through questions, administration procedures and scoring procedures. A standard score is often provided to measure the distance from average. There are two major kinds of standardized tests: aptitude and achievement (Popham, 1999).

Standards—Identify what students are expected to know and be able to do, measures proficiency. There are typically standards at the local, state and national levels. The national standards provide direction for the state standards and the state standards provide direction for the local districts. The local districts design their curriculum and align curriculum standards to ensure student mastery of state and national standards.

Professional development—"Increasing teacher knowledge and instruction in ways that translate into enhanced student achievement" (Desimone, 2011, p. 1). Professional development varies from school to school and many activities are labeled professional development: conferences, one-day lectures, on-going data collaboration, conversations in hallways, etc. Desimone (2011) stated that there are five elements that should be considered in regard to professional development: "content focus, active learning, coherence, duration and collective participation" (p. 2).

No Child Left Behind (2001 Elementary and Secondary Education Act)—A law that requires public school districts to be responsible for all students reaching proficiency levels within 12 years. The proficiency is measured through testing and No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and also requires public schools to analyze the proficiency of students with disabilities based on different economic, racial and ethnic backgrounds. If students

do not reach proficiency levels, "a series of corrective actions are delineated in the law, potentially resulting in restructuring, financial penalties, closure, or even takeover of the school by the state or a private management company" (Altshuler & Schmautz, 2006, p. 6).

Methodology

This study utilized an explanatory sequential mixed methods design in order to "obtain quantitative results but to explain such results in more detail, especially in terms of detailed voices and participant perspectives because little is known about the mechanisms behind the trends" (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011, p. 151). Qualitative and quantitative data was collected in order to fully understand the strategies being used by the public elementary school principals in Nebraska. The quantitative data was collected from a survey given to all public school elementary principals in Nebraska and the qualitative data was collected at a later point, with a small sample of principals that agreed to be interviewed following the survey.

The explanatory sequential mixed methods design involved collecting quantitative data first and then explaining the quantitative results with in-depth qualitative data. In the first, quantitative phase of the study, survey data was collected from elementary school principals in the state of Nebraska to assess the role of administrators in the preparation for statewide testing and the strategies recommended and required by principals to prepare students for statewide testing. The second, qualitative phase interviews were conducted to help explain the quantitative results. In this exploratory follow-up, the role of the principal and the strategies being utilized to prepare for statewide assessments in Nebraska public elementary schools were gathered.

Significance of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the role of the Nebraska public elementary school principals when preparing for statewide testing and the strategies recommended and required by principals to prepare students for statewide assessment. This study needed to be conducted as there was increasing literature on the preparation of public elementary schools for standardized achievement tests but there was no existing research about the principal's role in statewide testing.

Currently, classroom instructors were the focus of the literature that does exist on the preparation for statewide testing; not the instructional leader or principal.

Study Assumptions

The researcher made the following assumptions regarding this study:

1. Each participant is a Nebraska Public Elementary School Principal (grades K-6).

2. Each participant will answer the survey truthfully.

3. Each participant will have knowledge about the school-based test preparation strategies utilized in their school and/or district.

4. Each participant has a role in the preparation for statewide testing.

Delimitations

The delimitations of this study included the following:

1. The study only included Nebraska Elementary (grades K-6) Public School Principals.

Limitations

The limitations of this study were:

1. The research data was collected through principals self-reporting.

2. The principals may not realize that steps taken are strategies for test preparation.

Summary

This study utilized an explanatory sequential mixed methods design to define the role of Nebraska public elementary school principals in leading and engaging teachers in the use of school-based strategies to prepare for statewide assessment as well as identifying the strategies utilized for school based test preparation. This study provides information for instructional leaders in Nebraska and improve learning through the use of quality test preparation.

The second chapter of this study, the literature review, will detail high stakes testing in Nebraska, the impact of principal leadership on student achievement, and the impact of test preparation strategies upon student achievement.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

The literature was divided into three main areas in order to best provide information for this study, and is outlined below:

1. History of High Stakes Testing: This section "Testing in the United States of America" details the history of assessment in education, including how No Child Left Behind (United States Department of Education, 2004) has impacted the role of school administrators. No Child Left Behind (NCLB) is discussed, as well as the focus on high stakes assessments. The second part of this section, "High Stakes Testing in Nebraska," explains the history of assessment in the state of Nebraska and the current assessment results according to the State of the Schools Report.

2. Impact of Principal Leadership on Student Achievement: This section of the literature review provides the history of the principal's role in a school setting and research to demonstrate the principal's influence on student achievement. The research indicated that there are five areas (recruiting, professional development, collaboration, vision, understanding effective teaching and coaching) that principals focus their work in order to increase student achievement. Leadership theories that guided the work of principals were also included in this section of the literature review.

3. Impact of Test Preparation Strategies upon Student Achievement: Recommended instructional strategies for high-stakes testing were provided with guidelines for selecting the strategies, as well as instructional strategies

to maximize student learning.   Processes to increase student achievement (formative assessment process, differentiation, using data to guide instruction) are included, as well as a focus on curriculum alignment.

History of High Stakes Testing

Testing in the United States of America. Guba and Lincoln (1989) explained four-steps that have taken place throughout the history of evaluation.

> First generation evaluation marked the period up until World War I. It is described as the era of measurement, where students were characterized as objects. Tests were used to ascertain the students' content mastery. Shortly after World War I, the second generation of evaluation began, the era of description. Second generation evaluation techniques were objective-oriented. Early in the post-Sputnik period, third generation evaluation, with its emphasis on judgement and the standards upon which judgements were made, was born. The 1970s saw the initial appearance of techniques that were to go on and typify fourth generation or Responsive Constructivist Evaluation. The first three evaluation generations are described as being funded in the modernist tradition of closed systems with an emphasis on control. Fourth generation evaluation is based on a post-modern, constructivist paradigm typified by open systems with an emphasis on empowerment. (p. 21)

According to Pellegrino (1999), in 1957, Lee Cronbach focused on combining the "two disciplines of scientific psychology, experimental and correlational psychology" (p. 8). "He proposed linking theories and research on learning and instruction with the tradition of assessing individual differences in cognitive abilities" (p. 8). An educational assessment revolution took place from 1957-1990 "in an attempt to join the study of individual differences with the study of the human mind and bring both fields closer to the domains of learning instruction known as the enterprise of schooling" (p. 9).

In 1983, the National Commission on Excellence in Education submitted a report entitled, *A Nation at* Risk to the Secretary of Education. This report, *A Nation at Risk,* indicated that America's public education system was failing. After the report was

public, standards were increased for students and assessments became more frequent.

Graduation requirements increased and the expectations were felt from the top-down,

specifically starting at the state level. Suddenly, school administrators were expected to

step forward from the role as manager and lead the school as a business (Hunt, 2008).

"The beginning of assessment as an explicit topic of policy discussion in the United

States is usually marked at 1985, the year that the first national conference on this topic

was held" (Ewell, 2008, p. 7; Ewell, 2002).

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) was signed into law on January 8, 2002, and is a

reauthorization of the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (United States

Department of Education, 2004). According to Gardiner, Canfield-Davis, & Anderson

(2009):

> NCLB contains four basic principles designed to bring about: (1) stronger
> accountability for student academic performance, i.e., tougher state standards for
> students; (2) increased flexibility and local control over school operations, i.e.,
> flexibility in the way states spend federal dollars; (3) expanded school choice
> options for parents, i.e., parental choice in those schools labeled as 'chronically'
> failing schools; and (4) an emphasis on effective teaching methods, i.e., focusing
> resources in proven 'research-based' approaches. (p. 143)

"In 2001 Congress reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act

with the No Child Left Behind (NCLB). NCLB was purported to reform education and

improve student achievement through, among other mechanisms, demanding strict

accountability for results of student achievement" (Altshuler & Schmautz, 2006, p. 5).

There is increasing pressure on teachers and principals to prove that effective learning is

taking place by demonstrating student proficiency. The evidence for proficiency is

gathered through standardized testing based on state standards. The standardized testing

has become high stakes because there are consequences for school systems if student

performance is not satisfactory.

> NCLB has further entrenched high-stakes testing in the public school system.
> States must establish a baseline level of achievement from which they must
> demonstrate yearly improvement to reach the Elementary and Secondary
> Education Act goal of having all students reach the "proficient" level on state
> tests by 2014. (Altshuler & Schmautz, 2006, p. 6)

NCLB has required accountability but there have been many changes as a result.

Professional development has changed from ineffective, one-day workshops to

professional development that is results oriented, based on research and focused on data.

Accommodations for students are viewed as a continual need in the classroom, not just a

high-stakes test adjustment. Decisions are based on data and systems in place to collect

the data. NCLB has impacted education in many ways and the changes are regarded as

positive and/or negative depending upon the view of the stakeholder. Regardless of the

stakeholder's view, NCLB is a reality for education and schools need to move forward

toward proficiency in order to meet requirements (Cizek, 2001).

The introduction of high-stakes testing has increased the amount of assessments

given to students in order to gauge learning and gather data for analysis that guides

instruction and ultimately leads to student proficiency. "Using data systematically to ask

questions and obtain insight about student progress is a logical way to monitor

continuous improvement and tailor instruction to the needs of each student" (Hamilton

et al., 2009, p. 5). Assessments are being given in schools as a predictor of the

standardized tests and as an opportunity to develop interventions, if necessary, before the

actual high-stakes test.

"Supporters of the practice of high-stakes testing believe that the quality of American education can be vastly improved by introducing a system of rewards and sanctions for student academic performance" (Nichols, Glass, & Berliner, 2005, p. 1; Raymond & Hanushek, 2003, pp. 48-55). Ideally, student academic performance will improve if a goal is set and faculty are held accountable for the results; at-risk students will be targeted for improvement in order to avoid the sanctions. Action will be taken in order to receive the recognition or avoid the sanctions. High stakes testing is intended to motivate all of the stakeholders to continually increase achievement. The following quote, taken from a speech made by George W. Bush to explain NCLB best shows the intent:

> Accountability is an exercise in hope. When we raise academic standards, children raise their academic sights. When children are regularly tested, teachers know where and how to improve. When scores are known to parents, parents are empowered to push for change. When accountability for our schools is real, the results for our children are real. (U.S. Department of Education, 2002)

According to Amrein and Berliner (2002):

> Supporters of high-stakes testing also assume that the tests: are good measures of the curricula that is taught to students in our schools; provide a kind of "level playing field," an equal opportunity for all students to demonstrate their knowledge; and that are good measures of an individual's performance, little affected by differences in students' motivation, emotionality, language, and social status. (p. 5)

Not all of these factors are true for every situation and Amrein and Berliner (2002) feel the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle has an impact on the validity of the test. When applied to a high-stakes testing environment, this principle warns us that attaching serious personal and educational consequences to performance on tests for schools, administrators, teachers, and students, may have distorting and corrupting effects. Whether schools are narrowing curriculum, using drill activities, retaining students or

even cheating on the test, the scores on tests may increase but the actual student learning might not increase. Research indicates that high-stakes testing has unintended consequences for all stakeholders, however the point of this literature review is to understand the role of the principal in high-stakes testing, not to research the impact of high-stakes testing (Amrein & Berliner, 2002, 2003; Cizek, 2001; Madaus & Russell, 2010/2011).

High stakes testing in Nebraska. From 2000 to 2008, Nebraska utilized an assessment system called STARS (School-based Teacher-led Assessment and Reporting System) to meet NCLB requirements.   According to Gallagher (2009) STARS was:

> a home-grown assessment and accountability system that was reflective of and responsive to the state's and communities' unique historical, social and educational characteristics. As other states rushed to comply with NCLB through state tests, Nebraskans acted to preserve and enhance the unique character of its districts and schools, designing a system that bucked the one-size-fits-all approach of the federal government toward states and the one-size-fits-all approach most states take toward their districts. (p. 83)

STARS required a process that enabled districts to align curriculum at a local and state level without a high-stakes assessment. Roschewski, Isernhagen, and Dappen (2006) stated:

> In the STARS process, districts first adopt local or state standards for reading, mathematics, science and social studies in grades 4, 8 and 11. Districts then submit an assessment plan that includes norm-referenced measures and locally developed criterion-referenced measures to assess the district's standards at the identified grade levels. Finally, each district in Nebraska compiles a portfolio of its assessment procedures along with sample assessments and submits them to the state department for review and public rating. (p. 434)

A statewide criterion-referenced writing assessment was used for required NCLB reporting.

The 2008, Nebraska Legislature "required a single statewide assessment of the

Nebraska academic content standards for writing, reading, mathematics and science in

Nebraska's K-12 public schools" (Nebraska Department of Education, 2012b, p. 6). The

assessment is called Nebraska State Accountability (NeSA) and is administered for

reading and math in grades third through eighth and again in eleventh. Science began in

2012 for fifth, eighth and eleventh grades. Table 1 from the 2011-2012 State of the

Schools Report shows the percent proficient since 2009-2010 when the NeSA Reading

was first given (Nebraska Department of Education, 2012b).

Table 1

State of the Schools: Nebraska State Accountability: NeSA Scores Percent Proficient:

Meets/Exceeds Combined Results for All Grades Tested

	Reading	Mathematics	Science	Writing
2009-2010	69%			
2010-2011	72%	63%		
2011-2012	74%	67%	67%	
2012-2013	77%	69%	70%	68%

Source: Adapted from Nebraska State Accountability, Nebraska Department of Education (2012b).
Retrieved from http://reportcard.education.ne.gov/Default_State.aspx

In 2011-2012, the Nebraska Performance Accountability System (NePAS) was

created. NePAS ranks school districts by: status (average scale scores), improvement

(differences in the average scale scores of different students in the same grade), growth

(differences in average scale scores of same students this year to last year) and graduation

rates (Nebraska Department of Education, 2012a).

According to the Nebraska Department of Education, Table 2 from the 2011-2012

State of the Schools Report shows the number of:

Table 2

2012-13 State of the Schools: Nebraska School Districts Demonstrating Improvement

and Growth

Ranking	Reading	Mathematics
Improvement	205 of 248 districts	169 of 248 districts
Growth	204 of 248 districts	141 of 248 districts

Source: Adapted from Nebraska State Accountability, Nebraska Department of Education (2012b).
Retrieved from http://reportcard.education.ne.gov/Default_State.aspx

> School districts demonstrating improvement and growth based on two years of
> data. When two years of scale score data was compared, the majority of districts
> demonstrated improvement as well as positive growth. However, some districts
> had negative growth. Zero (0) is comparable to one year of learning for a student.
> (Nebraska Department of Education, 2012a)

The data from the State of the Schools Report shows growth and improvement in

Nebraska school districts. Success is being experienced in most districts. For this study,

principal leadership will be surveyed in all districts since poverty and diversity might

slow improvement and growth but powerful strategies could still be occurring.

Impact of Principal Leadership on Student Achievement

"Beginning in the 1930s and 1940s, unrest was growing that educational

management (note: *management*, not leadership) was not keeping up with the needs of

the educational community" (Dumas, 2010, p. 15; Moore, 1964). School administrators

were viewed as managers in schools. School administrators created schedules, managed

discipline and created a positive image in the community; "it was widely believed many

administrators came largely from the ranks of coaching or from the nation's corps of band directors" (Hunt, 2008, p. 1).

In the late 1980s, site-based management became popular. Site based management decentralized control from central district offices to individual school sites; "a potential force for empowering educators and communities" (David, 1995, p. 4). Principals were encouraged to be creative and open-minded. New ideas were sought out and innovation was encouraged. In many states, student achievement results were made public. The actions of the teachers were the focus; teaching was the priority, not learning (Hunt, 2008).

The most recent movement began in 2000 and focuses on individual student achievement, not the actions of teachers. School administrators are focused on school improvement, creating a school vision and working with other staff members to improve student achievement in subject areas for individual students. School administrators have become instructional leaders beginning in the early 2000s due to the introduction of No Child Left Behind (Hunt, 2008).

The role of the principal has evolved from a general, technical manager that oversees the building and is the teachers' boss to an instructional leader that impacts student achievement through teaching and learning. Lynch (2012) identified five responsibilities of effective instructional leaders:

> First through defining and communicating the school's educational mission, effective instructional leaders emphasize the importance of education for all students. . . . Second, through managing curriculum and instruction, effective instructional leaders support teacher use of research-based practices. Third, by supporting and supervising teaching, effective instructional leaders demonstrate the schools' commitment to teachers, which increases teachers' sense of belonging and self-worth. Fourth, through monitoring student progress, effective instructional leaders demonstrate the schools' commitment to students, which

enhances student self-work and promotes high academic performance. Finally, effective instructional leaders establish the same high expectations for all students. (DiPaola, Tscharmen-Moran, & Walther-Thomas, 2003, p. 42)

Principals have many responsibilities as instructional leaders but principals now have the ability to increase student achievement and raise expectations for staff and students. "Our basic claim is that the research over the last 35 years provides strong guidance on specific leadership behaviors for school administration and that those behaviors have well-documented effects on student achievement" (Marzano et al., 2005, p. 7). Teacher quality does impact student achievement but principals impact teacher quality as well. A connection exists between leadership, teacher quality and student achievement. "A growing body of research has found that principals strongly influence teacher quality—and, therefore, student achievement—through recruiting and retaining high quality teachers" (Young et al., 2007, p. 2).

Jim Collins (2001) also emphasized the importance of recruiting high quality teachers. Collins led a research team that analyzed the strategies of successful companies in order to understand how "good" companies transitioned into "great" companies. Collins found that great companies "first get the right people on the bus (and the wrong people off the bus) before you figure out where to drive it" (p. 44). The right people will be motivated to see the company succeed no matter which direction the bus goes. Collins (2001) also found that great companies make decisions based on facts and have leaders that are a blend of ambition and humility.

Once principals are able to "put the right people on the bus" they need to be able to assess the needs of a staff with varying years of experience in order to provide learning that increases student achievement. The planning for professional development is crucial

and is an opportunity for principals to develop staff through collaboration and learning.

"Similarily, it is the responsibility of district administration to coordinate the optimal use

of funding and time—including summertime and intersession breaks—toward continuous

learning and improvement" (Schmoker, 1999, p. 116). Professional development cannot

be a one-time training without accountability and in most school settings, accountability

is the responsibility of the principal. According to Reeves (2010):

> Compelling evidence suggests that teachers, school leaders, and students are
> much better served when professional learning is focused on the deep and
> consistent implementation of a few things. That is, however, contrary to the
> general trend of professional learning that is characterized by the introduction of
> many ideas but the deep implementation of few if any of them. (p. 53)

Professional development can be provided in a professional learning community

(PLC). The PLC's purpose is to "ensure that all students *learn* rather than to see to it that

all students are *taught*" (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, &Karhanek, 2010, p. 7). The PLC uses

these four questions to gauge learning:

1. What is it we want all students to learn-by grade level, by course, and by unit of instruction?
2. How will we know when each student has learned- that is acquired the knowledge, skill, and dispositions deemed essential?
3. How will we respond when students experience initial difficulty in their learning?
4. How will we enrich and extend the learning for student who are already proficient? (p. 8)

The PLC is a collaborative approach by the teachers to ensure learning is taking place, a

system is established for students that are not learning and teachers use data to monitor

progress. DuFour and Eaker (1998) shared six characteristics of PLCs:

1. shared mission, vision and values,
2. collective inquiry,
3. collaborative teams,
4. action orientation and experimentation,
5. continuous improvement, and

6. results orientation. (pp. 25-29)

PLCs use teacher collaboration and the monitoring of student data to create a system

focused on student and teacher learning. In an effective PLC, a teacher continually learns

and improves while increasing student achievement.

O'Shea (2005) focused on the principal's role in high-stakes testing and supported

the ideas of the DuFour et al. (2010). His ideas included building a strong community

support base and involving staff in the process. O'Shea (2005) emphasized the need for

collaborative planning time and effective professional development. All of the

stakeholders need to be prepared for change and understand why the change in learning,

teaching, and assessment is occurring.

Michael Fullan (2008) identified a theory of action to assist leaders during

continuous improvement. Fullan's theory includes six secrets of change that are not

hidden but complex ideas that make change difficult in schools and organizations.

1. Love your employees. Staff feel valued in a positive culture
    and are motivated to do their best.
2. Connect peers with purpose. Staff collaborate with a collective
    purpose and the culture grows to be connected.
3. Capacity building prevails. Focus on improvement, not labeling. Hire staff
    that wants to learn from others.
4. Learning is the work. Staff use the collective purpose and collaborate to
    learn from one another and consistently improve.
5. Transparency rules. Finding ways to measure results for specific targets that
    are clear to all involved.
6. Systems learn. Qualities that leaders need in order to create a successful
    system that is sustainable (modesty, confidence, create vision, use integrative
    thinking, share leadership). (pp.11-12)

Fullan's secrets are interwoven. For example, it is difficult to work on secret number

four, learning is the work, if the peers are not connected with purpose, secret number two

(2008, p. 11). There are many similarities between Michael Fullan's six secrets and the

PLCs discussed by DuFour and Eaker (1998). Fullan (2008) supports PLCs when they

are practiced with fidelity.

Marzano (2007) gathered research to discover the effect of the classroom teacher

on student achievement. He found a study by Nye, Konstantopoulos, and Hedges (2004)

that showed the quality of the classroom teacher has a dramatic effect. This study is

> the most compelling because it controlled for factors such as the previous
> achievement of students, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, gender, class size, and
> whether or not an aide was present in class. The study involved 79 elementary
> schools in 42 school districts in Tennessee. (Marzano, 2007, p. 2)

The summary of the results of the study by Nye et al. (2004) stated:

> These findings would suggest that the difference in achievement gains between
> having a 25th percentile teacher (a not so effective teacher) and a 75th percentile
> teacher (an effective teacher) is over one-third of a standard deviation (0.35) in
> reading and almost half a standard deviation (.048) in mathematics. Similarly, the
> difference in achievement gains between have a 50th percentile teacher (an
> average teacher) and a 90th percentile teacher (a very effective teacher) is about
> one-third of a standard deviation (0.33) in reading and somewhat smaller than a
> standard deviation (0.46) in mathematics. . . These effects are certainly large
> enough effects to have policy significance. (p. 253)

Marzano (2007) depicted Nye et al.'s (2004) findings, which indicated "that

students who have a teacher at the 75th percentile in terms of pedagogical competence

will outgain students who have a teacher at the 25th percentile by 14 percentile points in

reading and 18 percentile points in mathematics" (p. 3).

Marzano (2007) stated, "that students who have a 90th percentile teacher in

pedagogical competence will outgain students who have a 50th percentile teacher by 13

percentile points in reading and 18 percentile points in mathematics" (p. 3).

As a principal, it is not only crucial to hire quality teachers but to ensure that

teachers continue to grow with best practices and are effective in the classroom.

Effective teachers do positively impact student achievement and principals can impact

student achievement by coaching teachers to be as effective as possible. If teachers are able to be coached and receive feedback the student achievement increases. Biancarosa, Bryk and Dexter (2010) studied coached schools versus non-coached schools in a literacy study and found the percentage of growth in literacy skills within coached schools shown in Table 3.

Table 3

Literacy Skill Growth Experienced in Coached Schools

Year	Percentage of Growth
1	16%
2	28%
3	32%

Source: Adapted from Biancarosa et al. (2010, p. 24).

Coaching can be brought into a school through instructional rounds. According to Marzano (2011), "Instruction rounds are one of the most valuable tools that a school or district can use to enhance teachers' pedagogical skills and develop a culture of collaboration" (p. 1). A small group of teachers observes in a classroom with the purpose of comparing their instructional practices and having time as a group to discuss instructional practices (during debriefing rounds). The practice encourages collaboration, reflection and can provide the teacher being observed with feedback, if he or she chooses. The principal can participate in the group but the purpose is coaching, not evaluation and the purpose needs to be clear to all involved in the process (Marzano, 2007).

Allison Kretlow and Christina Bartholomew (2010) reviewed the coaching

literature and identified three critical components of effective coaching: "(a) highly

engaged, instructive group training sessions; (b) follow-up observation(s); and (c)

specific feedback, often including sharing observation data and self-evaluation followed

by modeling" (p. 292). These components were cited in Marzano and Simms (2013).

Marzano and Simms (2013) reviewed four practices that are essential in coaching:

> (1) establishing a model of effective teaching, (2) using a scale to measure
> teachers' progress, (3) conducting a self-audit, and (4) establishing a coaching
> perspective" (p. 19). In order to establish an effective model of teaching,
> Marzano and Simms described three segments that frame nine design questions.
> The lesson segments are "(1) Lesson segments involving routine events,
> (2) Lesson segments addressing content and (3) Lesson segments enacted on the
> spot. (p. 21)

There are 41 elements within each of the nine design questions. For example, the

design question, What will I do to engage students?, has nine elements (noticing when

students are not engaged, using academic games, managing response rates, etc.)

(Marzano & Simms, 2013, pp. 19-21) that provide a model of effective teaching for

coaching. Marzano and Simms (2013) developed a profile for self-audit and scales to

measure progress for each element. The principal uses the four practices of coaching to

coach teachers to be effective and toward continuous improvement (Marzano & Simms,

2013). The three segments contain nine design questions as described in Table 4.

Santoyo and Peiser (2012) stated a core idea, "The primary purpose of

observation should not be to judge the quality of teachers, but to find the most effective

ways to coach them to improve student learning" (p. 63). There needs to be a division

between coaching and evaluation, coaching is not evaluative. Santoyo and Peiser use a

Table 4

Marzano & Simms's Lesson Segments and Design Questions

3 Lesson Segments	9 Design Questions
Involving Routine Events	What will I do to establish and communicate learning goals, track student progress and celebrate success?
	What will I do to establish and maintain classroom rules and procedures?
Addressing Content	What will I do to help students effectively interact with new knowledge?
	What will I do to help students practice and deepen their understanding of new knowledge?
	What will I do to help students generate and test hypotheses about new knowledge?
Enacted on the Spot	What will I do to engage students?
	What will I do to recognize and acknowledge adherence or lack of adherence to rules and procedures?
	What will I do to establish and maintain effective relationships with students?
	What will I do to communicate high expectations for all students?

Source: Adapted from *Coaching Classroom instruction* (Marzano & Simms, 2013, pp. 19–20). Copyright 2013 by Marzano Research Laboratory.

model of observation and feedback that includes scheduled observations (frequent and regular), key action steps (identified from observation), effective feedback (face to face with specific action steps) and direct accountability (practice is required) (Santoyo & Peiser, 2012).

The Balanced Leadership Framework (Waters & Cameron, 2007) "found a statistically significant correlation between school-level leadership and student achievement of .25" (p. 3) and "identified 21 leadership responsibilities with statistically significant correlations to student achievement and 66 practices or behaviors for fulfilling

these responsibilities" (p. 3). The 21 responsibilities define the role of a school leader

and the responsibilities are behaviors that leaders exhibit to increase student achievement.

The leadership responsibilities are listed in Table 5 and the table also shows their

correlations with student achievement.

Table 5

McRel's 21 Responsibilites of School Leaders and Their Correlations to Student

Achievement

Correlation with Achievement	Responsibility
.33	Situational Awareness
.28	Flexibility
.27	Discipline, Outreach, Monitoring/Evaluating
.25	Culture, Order, Resources, Knowledge of Curriculum/Instruction/Assessment, Input, Change Agent
.24	Focus, Contingent Rewards, Intellectual Stimulation
.23	Communication
.22	Ideals/Beliefs
.20	Involvement in Curriculum/Instruction/Assessment, Visibility, Optimizer
.19	Affirmation
.18	Relationships

Source: Adapted from *School leadership that works: From research to results* (Marzano et al., 2005, p. 63).

Waters and Cameron (2007) also identified a third finding: "Not all strong

leaders have a positive impact on student achievement" (p. 9). The leader does not

impact student achievement if he or she chooses practices or behaviors that do not focus on student achievement or underestimate the power of change. There are two changes: first-order (viewed as an extension of the past) and second-order (viewed as a break from the past) and each change requires different responsibilities. A leader might utilize all 21 responsibilities but be unable to determine if a change is first or second order and have no impact on student achievement (Waters & Cameron, 2007).

The 21 responsibilities are a part of the Balanced Leadership Framework (Waters & Cameron, 2007) which are illustrated in Figure 1. The Framework groups the responsibilities into a structure containing four elements: Leadership, Focus, Magnitude of Change, and Purposeful Community.
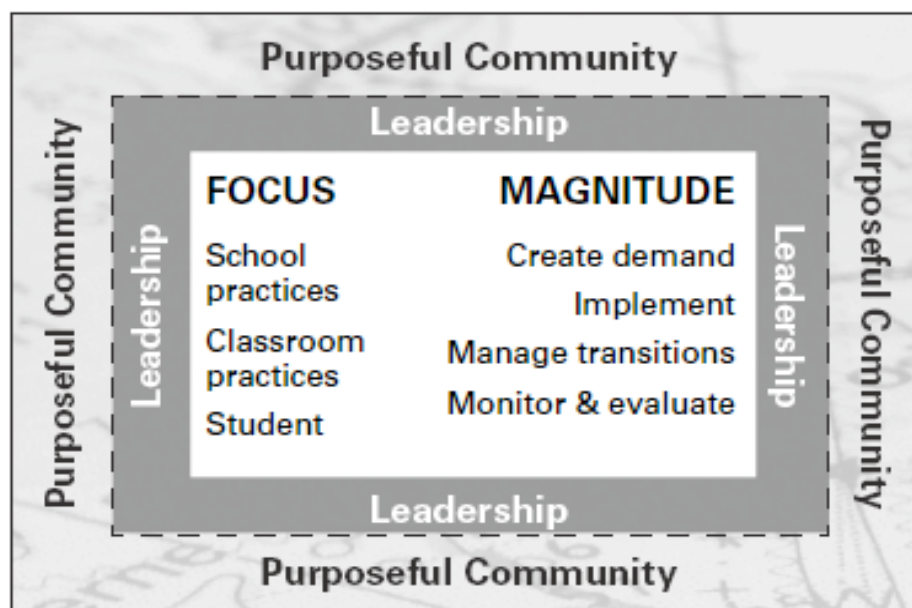
(Source: Adapted from *The Balanced Leadership Framework: Connecting Vision with Action* (Waters & Cameron, 2007, p. 15).

Figure 1. Balanced leadership framework.

Leadership is the foundation component of the Framework. Leadership is located between Focus, Magnitude and Purposeful Community and the dotted lines show the flow between leadership and the other components (Waters & Cameron, 2007, p. 15).

Marzano et al. (2005) suggested a five step plan for successful leadership that impacts student achievement:

1. Develop a strong school leadership team based on the foundation of a purposeful community.
2. Distribute some of the 21 responsibilities throughout the leadership team.
3. Select the right work.
4. Identify the order of magnitude implied by the selected work.
5. Match the management style to the order of magnitude of the change initiative. (p. 98)

The five-step plan depends upon principals being able to effectively lead change and share leadership. Changes that are perceived as second-order require principals to focus on seven specific leadership responsibilities and share four leadership responsibilities. Shared leadership not only allows the principal to focus on the essentials but also allows others to develop leadership skills which benefits the school (Waters & Cameron, 2007).

Mike Schmoker (1999) stated, "Schools improve when purpose and effort unite. One key is leadership that recognizes its most vital function: to keep everyone's eyes on the prize of improved student learning" (p. 111). The focus that Schmoker is describing is not easy to accomplish. There are many details that can become distractions on a daily basis but student learning and improved student achievement has to be the constant goal. One way to maintain the goal is to recognize accomplishments. According to Schmoker (1999),

> Just as regular consultation of data and indicators is essential to sustained targeted effort, so also is regular praise, recognition, and celebration necessary to keep the effort focused and energized. Success and improvement are every bit as social as they are structural. (p. 112)

There are many ways to recognize the stakeholders and a leader needs to discover the methods that the group and individuals prefer in order to encourage continuous improvement.

Reeves (2010) has three essential elements for leadership focus:

1. Leaders remain fixated on the fact that student achievement is the criterion for evaluating teaching, the curriculum, and assessment strategies.
2. Leaders focus on equity of educational opportunity through common curriculum and assessments.
3. Leaders focus on developing leaders. (p. 70)

Reeves (2010) discusses the power of focus and the need not only for focus but to focus on the "right things: teaching, curriculum, assessment and leadership" (p. 65). Administrators guide the staff throughout the improvement process. Reeves believes that teachers do have a major part in improving student achievement but "only when they are supported by school and system leaders who give them the time, the professional learning opportunities, and the respect that are essential for effective teaching" (p. 70). If the administrators are not aware of the need for support and accountability, student achievement can be negatively impacted.

The National Association of Elementary School Principals (2008) supports principals modeling learning for the school. Modeling is also supported by Dennis Sparks (2004), "Organizations are successful and most likely to sustain that success over time when leaders at all levels serve as teachers of others. Such leaders establish teaching and learning for everyone as an organizational norm" (p. xix). Everyone needs to be improving and if the leader is learning and making progress he or she sets the expectations high for others. The principal needs to consistently place the vision for the school in front of all stakeholders, engage the community to share responsibility for

student performance and distribute leadership (National Association of Elementary

School Principals, 2008).

Impact of Test Preparation Strategies upon Student Achievement

Any type of assessment requires preparation, but high-stakes testing has received

the most attention since low performance can have serious consequences for the school

staff. There are many strategies, positive and negative, available to prepare for

standardized testing. Principals have many choices to lead their staff toward increased

achievement scores. According to Johannessen and Kahn (2001), there are ten strategies

to prepare students for high-stakes tests:

1. Teacher should be assessment literate.
2. Do a task analysis of each part of the test to identify what students need to know and be able to do.
3. Create a positive classroom environment toward assessment.
4. Use the test as an opportunity for inquiry or problem-based learning.
5. In preparing students for writing assessments, emphasize the development of content over form and formulaic writing.
6. Integrate any test preparation within your curriculum throughout the year.
7. Just because something isn't on the test, doesn't mean it should be eliminated from the language arts curriculum.
8. Communicate with parents, administrators, school boards, etc. what you are doing to prepare students, why, and how they can also help from their end.
9. Avoid panic over results on one test.
10. Be careful about using competition to motivate students to perform well.
    (p. 4)

The previous ten strategies were also supported in numerous other writings. The

American Federation of Teachers (2008) recommended that "standards be provided for

each grade . . . and must be clear, sequenced and focused on specific content," and "clear

curriculum and classroom resources must be provided to enable teachers to provide

quality instruction" (p. 5). Teachers need to be able to balance subject-area content and

statewide testing preparation for well-rounded students.

W. J. Popham (1991) suggested two evaluative standards that are straightforward and align with the strategies of Johannessen and Kahn (2001):

1. Professional ethics: No test preparation practice should violate the ethical standards of the education profession.
2. Educational defensibility: No test preparation practice should increase students' test scores without simultaneously increasing student mastery of the content domain tested. (Moore, 1994, p. 55; Popham, 1991, pp. 13-14)

Differentiation is a popular word in education today for ensuring learning and improving student achievement. According to Rick Wormeli (2007), "Differentiation is foremost a professional and responsive mind-set" (p. 7) that can be guided by these questions:

- Are we willing to teach in whatever way is necessary for students to learn best, even if the approach doesn't match our own preferences?
- Do we have the courage to do what works, not just what's easiest?
- Do we actively seek to understand our students' knowledge, skills, and talents so we can provide an appropriate match for their learning needs?
- Do we continually build a large and diverse repertoire of instructional strategies so we have more than one way to teach?
- Do we organize our classrooms for students' learning or for our teaching?
- Do we keep up-to-date on the latest research about learning, students' developmental growth, and our content specialty areas?
- Do we ceaselessly self-analyze and reflect on our lessons- including our assessments- searching for ways to improve?
- Are we open to critique?
- Do we push students to become their own education advocates and give them the tools to do so?
- Do we regularly close the gap between knowing what to do and actually doing it? (pp. 7-8)

Differentiation involves teachers knowing each student in order to meet his or her needs for learning. Lorna Earl (2003) shared a common sense version of differentiation:

Differentiation is making sure that the right students get the right learning tasks at the right time. Once you have a sense of what each student holds as 'given' or 'known' and what he or she needs in order to learn, differentiation is no longer an option. It is an obvious response. (pp 86-87)

Dean, Hubbell, Pitler, and Stone (2012) emphasized the importance of a common language for instruction and using a common set of effective instructional strategies in order to increase student achievement. Marzano identified nine strategies as being capable of increasing student achievement. Dean et al. found that the nine strategies are not solutions but "best bets if teachers incorporate them systematically and intentionally as they plan and deliver instruction" (Dean et al., 2012, p. xiii). The nine strategies from Marzano, Pickering, and Pollock (2001) are:

1. setting objectives and providing feedback,
2. questions, cues, and advance organizers,
3. nonlinguistic representation,
4. summarizing and note taking,
5. identifying similarities and differences,
6. generating and testing hypotheses,
7. cooperative learning,
8. homework and practice, and
9. reinforcing effort and providing recognition. (p. 7)

Dean et al. (2012) created a framework to assist teachers with instructional planning. The framework has three components: (a) creating the environment for learning, (b) helping students develop understanding, and (c) helping students extend and apply knowledge (p. xv). Creating the environment for learning provides the setting for every lesson, helping students develop understanding reminds teachers that students come with prior knowledge and new knowledge needs to be connected and helping students extend and apply knowledge uses the knowledge in a real-world setting and involves complex thinking (Dean et al., 2012). The framework follows with the nine strategies fit into the components developed by Dean et al. (2012) (see Figure 2).
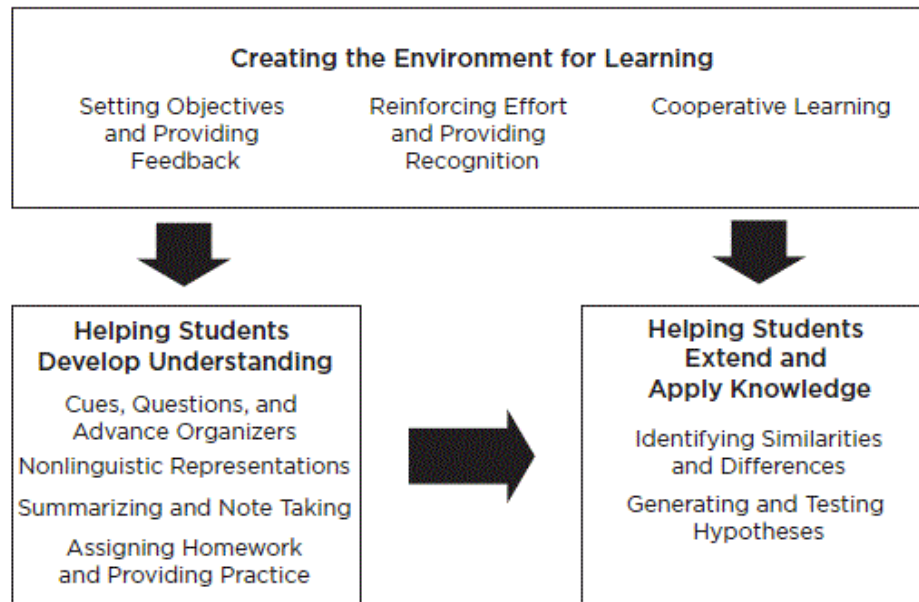
Source: Adapted from *Classroom instruction that works: Research based strategies for increasing student achievement* (Dean et al., 2012, p. xvi).

Figure 2. Framework for teacher instructional planning.

Moss and Brookhart (2009) supported the formative assessment process as a successful strategy to focus on learning and increase student achievement. Formative assessment takes place when teachers and students know the learning goal, understand where the student is currently working related to the goal and then takes steps to move closer to the goal. Moss and Brookhart identified six elements of the formative assessment process:

1. shared learning targets and criteria for success,
2. feedback that feeds forward,
3. student goal setting,
4. student self-assessment,
5. strategic teacher questioning, and
6. student engagement in asking effective questions. (p. 5)

Moss and Brookhart (2009) encouraged student self-awareness through self-assessment and goal setting. Students play a powerful role in the classroom as they

become aware of their learning in relation to the learning target. Students monitor their learning and decide whether or not they are making progress toward mastering the learning target. Teachers are facilitators in this process and guide students. Practice is needed for most students to self-assess and set goals that are motivating.

Aligning curriculum to standards, curriculum mapping and curriculum benchmarks are all recommended test preparation strategies. Teachers need to have a thorough understanding of the standards that students are expected to master in order to assure learning opportunities for students. The curriculum should be a direct path to mastery of standards, which define achievement. "The teacher's classroom assessment job is to evaluate student mastery of the classroom-level achievement targets that underpin student success in working to a place where they are ready to demonstrate that they have met the state standard" (Chappuis, Stiggins, Arter, & Chappuis , 2004, p. 41). The learning goal or target is mastery of the standard within the curriculum, coupled with effective instruction that monitors student understanding (Chappuis et al., 2004; Supon, 2008; Wiggins & McTighe , 2007).

Voltz, Sims, and Nelson (2010) stated that "ideally, assessment should be used to inform instruction" (p. 116). Identifying the prior knowledge and current needs of the students is time consuming but using data and collaboration is a highly recommended method for increasing student achievement (Schmoker, 1999). Schmoker recommended three concepts that are the foundation for school improvement: "informed, effective teamwork; goal setting; and the use of performance data" (1999, p. 56). Using these three concepts, schools are to create improvement by analyzing and adjusting to consistently move toward increasing student achievement. "When they assess for

learning, teachers use classroom assessment and the continuous flow of information about student achievement that it provides to advance, not merely check on, student learning" (Chappuis et al., 2004, p. 35).

Hamilton et al. (2009) provided five recommendations to improve student achievement:

1. Make data part of an ongoing cycle of instructional improvement.
2. Teach students to examine their own data and set learning goals.
3. Establish a clear vision for school-wide data use.
4. Provide supports that foster a data-driven culture within the school.
5. Develop and maintain a district-wide data system. (p. 15)

Boykin and Noguera (2011) revealed the strategies of a successful school district with diverse students and the strategies are similar to authors cited previously:

> The performance of each student is monitored closely, teachers receive professional development that is tailored to enable them to become more effective at meeting learning needs, and schools have systems in place to intervene early when students are not making progress. These are all strategies that show up repeatedly in the research literature as essential for student success. (p. 164)

Focus on the individuals, students and teachers, is a reoccurring theme in the research. In order to improve student achievement, the learning of every student and teacher needs to be assessed and then strategies provided to ensure growth for each individual.

There was not much written about standardized test preparation in Nebraska due to Nebraska's late entrance onto the statewide testing field in 2010. This study will benefit the field of education (administrators, teachers, students) in Nebraska by identifying the strategies used to prepare for standardized tests in the early years of statewide testing.

Summary of the Literature Review

No Child Left Behind has increased the need for schools to show improvement in student achievement through high-stakes testing in Nebraska. The pressure to increase student achievement has created a change in the role of leaders. Principals are not just building managers, they have now grown to be an instructional leader as well.

As instructional leaders, principals do impact student achievement and have opportunities to increase student achievement. Principals need to develop and consistently communicate a vision to the school and community. The vision, or goal, is what drives the improvement process and provides purpose for all involved. Principals communicate with teachers about effective instruction and coach teachers toward improvement while maintaining focus on individual students by basing decisions on data and ensuring that every student meets the learning target or objective.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Research Design

The goal of this study was to collect both quantitative and qualitative data in order

to study the role of Nebraska public elementary school principals in the statewide

assessment process. A mixed method design was used to collect and analyze data while

conducting this study. According to Creswell and Plano Clark (2011):

> Mixed methods research provides more evidence for studying a research problem
> than either quantitative or qualitative research alone. Researchers are enabled to
> use all of the tools of data collection available rather than being restricted to the
> types of data collection typically associated with quantitative research or
> qualitative research. (p. 12)

Mixed methods research "provides strengths that offset the weaknesses of both

quantitative and qualitative research" (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011, p. 12). The study

collected the voices of the Nebraska public school elementary principals as well as the

facts about the types of strategies encouraged and required by principals.

Creswell and Plano Clark (2011) detailed six mixed methods research designs that

reflect interaction, priority, timing, and mixing:

1. the convergent parallel design,
2. the explanatory sequential design,
3. the exploratory sequential design,
4. the embedded design,
5. the transformative design, and
6. the multiphase design. (p. 69)

This study utilized the explanatory sequential design and according to Creswell and

Plano Clark (2011) (see Figure 3):

Quantitative Data Collection and Analysis → Follow up with → Qualitative Data Collection and Analysis → Interpretation
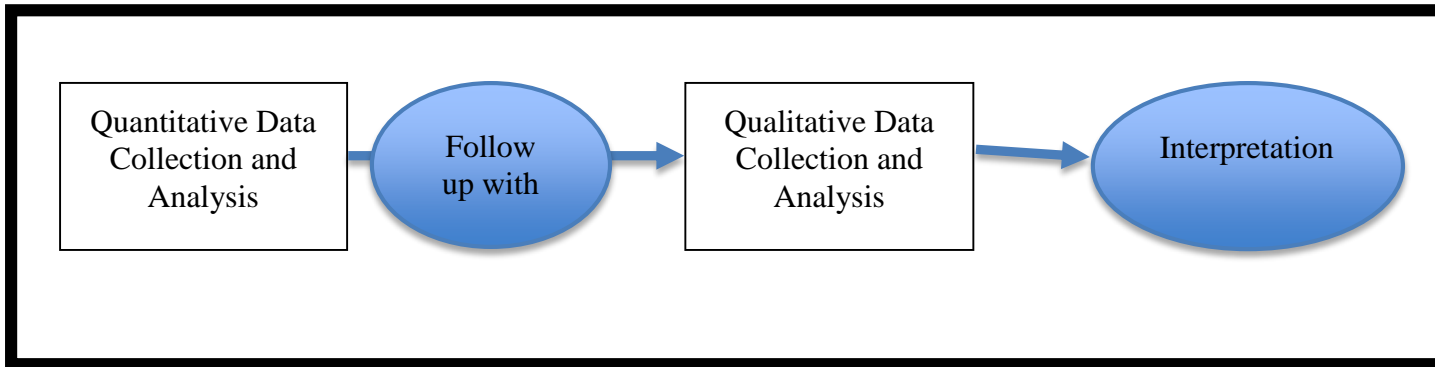
Source: Creswell and Plano Clark (2011, p. 71)

Figure 3. Explanatory sequential design.

The explanatory sequential design "occurs in two distinct interactive phases. This design starts with the collection and analysis of quantitative data, which has the priority for addressing the study's questions. This first phase is followed by the subsequent collection and analysis of qualitative data. The second, qualitative phase of the study is designed so that it follows from the results of the first, quantitative phase. The researcher interprets how the qualitative results help to explain the initial quantitative results. (p. 71)

The first phase of this study collected quantitative data through a survey distributed to public Nebraska elementary school principals. The first phase identified the participants for the second phase and answered the following research questions: The central question for this study was: What is the role of Nebraska public elementary school principals (grades K-5) in leading and engaging teachers in the preparation for state wide testing?

Sub-questions for the study were:

1. What are the primary strategies used by elementary principals in Nebraska public schools for preparing for standardized testing?

2. Has professional development been utilized by Nebraska elementary principals in order to assist teachers in the preparation for standardized testing? And if it has been used, what types of professional development?

3. What leadership plans have Nebraska Public Elementary Schools and/or their school districts followed to prepare for standardized testing?

The second phase of the study collected qualitative data through individual interviews. The participants were selected from the first phase (survey) by utilizing extreme case sampling. The participants were selected by the fewest or the most strategies implemented in their schools.

Phase 1—Quantitative.

Survey, participants and sampling plan. The survey was created by the researcher through the literature (included in Appendix D). The survey contained eight questions and took approximately ten minutes to complete. The questions consisted of the following: two of the eight questions address demographic information about the principal, the years served as a principal and as a teacher; one question asks whether the participant uses professional development to assist teachers in preparing for statewide testing; two questions provide an opportunity for participants to provide additional strategies used by the principals that are not listed, and three of the questions ask participants to choose the extent listed strategies are used on a Likert scale from "Extremely Small Extent" to "Extremely Large Extent." The three Likert scale questions vary the number of strategies to rate from seven to ten. The question addressing the strategies principals encourage or require staff to use to prepare for statewide testing lists ten (10) strategies, the question addressing the leadership strategies used by principals lists eight (8) strategies and the question addressing the professional development strategies used lists seven (7) strategies for principals to rate. The strategies listed were gained from the literature review.

The questionnaire was sent to 524 public elementary school principals in the state of Nebraska using Qualitrics for the web-based survey. One district denied the researcher's request to conduct research, so 62 Nebraska public elementary principals were not included in the study. Elementary schools are considered to contain Kindergarten through fifth grades for this study. The principals' contact information was obtained from the Nebraska Department of Education's website and the researcher did

not participate. The email invitation was sent to principals on October l, 2014, and a

reminder was sent four weeks later. Offering two opportunities for the elementary

principals to complete the questionnaire and utilizing the contact list obtained through the

Nebraska Department of Education will reduce coverage errors. One hundred seventeen

(117) Nebraska public elementary school principals started the survey and 102 completed

the survey.

Data analysis. The dependent variable being studied was the preparation by

public elementary principals for statewide testing. The single items revealed data that

needs to be analyzed (the strategies that principals were encouraging/requiring for

statewide assessment preparation); the summed items will reveal more data (the total

strategies being utilized by schools for statewide assessment preparation); and the

correlations will also reveal data for the study.

Qualtrics was used to distribute the surveys and collect the data. The data was

downloaded on an Excel spreadsheet. There were single items to describe, compare and

look for correlations, as well as summed scores. Qualtrics allows the researcher to

quickly find the measure of central tendency, the measures of variability and the

measures of relative standing. The next step was the hypothesis testing, finding the

confidence interval and the effect size. Based upon the data, an appropriate statistic was

chosen and the results are reported using tables, figures and detailed explanations.

Pilot study procedures. Two types of validity, face and content validity were

chosen for this study. Thirteen principals reviewed the questionnaire and provided

feedback for face validity. The district experts read the questionnaire for content

validity. One of the district experts was the assistant superintendent and the other was the

teaching and learning coordinator. The elementary supervisor of teaching and learning was also asked for feedback.

The researcher contacted experts in the area of instruction and assessment, as well as an expert in the area of survey construction in order to develop a survey that would answer the research questions. Two experts in the area of instruction and assessment were asked for feedback, Dr. Robin Dexter, Associate Superintendent of Grand Island Public Schools and Deb Karle, Teaching and Learning Coordinator (Assessment) for Grand Island Public Schools. Dr. Dexter questioned the choice of "Extremely small extent" and "Extremely Large Extent" on the Likert Scale but the choice was validated by the survey construction expert, Dr. Del Harnisch, University of Nebraska at Lincoln. Deb Karle suggested changes for consistent wording in the survey, which was made so that all choices began with a verb. Dr. Harnisch suggested the Likert Scale with the choices of "Extremely Small Extent" to "Extremely Large Extent" that remained with the survey. Positive comments included "concise," "meaningful," and "will provide rich information on the clear statements that you have created."

The test-retest method was used for checking for reliability. The survey was given to a sample and then retested 4 weeks later. The correlation coefficient was 7.0 which indicated good test-retest reliability.

Phase 2—Qualitative.

Participants and sampling. The participants in the second, qualitative phase were selected from the population in the first, quantitative phase. Extreme case sampling was used to select the participants in the second phase so the unusual, troublesome, or enlightened cases were selected for the qualitative phase.

> In terms of the number of participants, rather than select a large number of people or sites, the qualitative researcher identifies and recruits a small number that will provide in-depth information about the central phenomenon or concept being explored in the study. (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011, p. 174)

Informed consent letters were signed by the participants (found in the Appendix).

The second phase of the study provided a deeper understanding of the strategies implemented in order to prepare for statewide testing in Nebraska elementary schools and discovered the rationale behind the principals' answers. The interviews were conducted using a protocol of open-ended response questions. An outline for the interview can be found in Appendix G but the questions depended upon the survey responses. The protocol was developed after the data from the first, quantitative phase was analyzed.

> The first step is to conduct the quantitative analysis and examine the results . . . the researcher should identify the results that need further information and use these results to guide the design of the qualitative phase research questions, sample selection, and data collection questions. (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011, p. 186)

The interviews were recorded, then transcribed and returned to the participants for member checking "so that they can judge the accuracy and credibility of the account" (Creswell, 2007, p. 208). The participants reviewed the transcript of their interview in order to verify the information and check for accuracy before data analysis.

Data analysis. The data analysis used in this qualitative research study consisted of "preparing and organizing the data for analysis, then reducing the data into themes through a process of coding and condensing the codes, and finally representing the data in figures, tables, or a discussion" (Creswell, 2007, p. 148). The process of analysis began with reading through the interview transcripts in order to become familiar with the data. Then a coding system was established in order to help identify themes in the data.

Mixed methods data analysis. The data from each phase (qualitative and quantitative) were first analyzed separately.

> The second, qualitative phase builds on the first, quantitative phase, and the two phases are connected in the intermediate stage in the study. The rationale for this approach is that the quantitative data and their subsequent analysis provide a general understanding of the research problem. The qualitative data and their analysis refine and explain those statistical results by exploring participants' views in more depth. (Ivankova, Creswell, & Stick, 2006)

Summary

In the first phase of this study the researcher collected quantitative data through a survey distributed to public Nebraska school elementary principals. The first phase identified the participants for the second phase. In the second phase of the study the researcher collected qualitative data through interviews that enriched the study by better clarifying the quantitative results.

Chapter 4

Results

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine the role of Nebraska public elementary school principals when preparing for statewide testing and the strategies used by principals to prepare students for statewide assessment. The central question for this study was: What is the role of Nebraska public elementary school principals (grades K-5) in leading and engaging teachers in the use of preparation for state wide testing?

Quantitative sub-questions for the study:

1. What are the primary strategies used by elementary principals in Nebraska public schools for preparing for standardized testing?

2. Has professional development been utilized by Nebraska elementary principals in order to assist teachers in the preparation for standardized testing? And if it has been used, what types of professional development?

3. What leadership plans have Nebraska Public Elementary Schools and/or their school districts implemented to prepare for standardized testing?

Qualitative sub-questions for the study:

1. Which of the strategies used by staff at your school to prepare for standardized testing were the most effective? Why? Least effective? Why?

2. Which types of professional development offered at your school to prepare for standardized testing were the most effective? Why? Least effective? Why?

3. Which types of leadership plans implemented by your school and/or district were the most effective? Why? Least effective? Why?

4. Who determines which strategies will be encouraged/required/offered in your school? And at the district level?

5. What data is available supporting the successful use of the strategies at your school? And at the district level?

Quantitative Results

The survey was sent to 524 public elementary school principals in the state of Nebraska using Qualtrics for the web-based survey. One district denied the researcher's request to conduct research and as a result, 62 Nebraska public elementary principals were not included in the study. Elementary schools are considered to contain Kindergarten through fifth grades for this study. The principals' contact information was obtained from the Nebraska Department of Education's website and the researcher did not participate. The email invitation was sent to principals on October l, 2014, and a reminder was sent 4 weeks later. Offering 2 opportunities for the elementary principals to complete the questionnaire and utilizing the contact list obtained through the Nebraska Department of Education helped to reduce coverage errors. One hundred seventeen (117) Nebraska public elementary school principals started the survey and 102 completed the survey. The 15 surveys that were not completed were removed from the results.

More than half of the 102 participating principals had 10 years or fewer in the role of a principal (64%) and were teachers for more than 10 years (56%) before becoming principals. Thirty-five percent (35%) of the principals were teachers for 5 to 10 years. Less than 10% of the principals taught 4 years or less and 32% of the principals have

been administrators for 4 years or less. Twenty-three percent (23%) of the participating

principals had 11-20 years of experience and 13% of the principals had more than 20

years of experience as a principal. There were 2 survey questions that gathered

demographic information about the principals and Table 6 shows the number of years the

participating principals were teachers while Table 7 shows the number of years served as

a principal.

Table 6

Number of Years as a Teacher

0-4 Years	5-10 Years	11-20 Years	20+ Years
9%	35%	40%	16%

Table 7

Number of Years as a Principal

1-4 Years	5-10 Years	11-20 Years	20+ Years
32%	31%	23%	14%

Participants were asked to identify the extent that staff was encouraged or

required to implement strategies identified through research as effective methods to

improve instruction and ultimately prepare for statewide testing. Ninety-eight percent

(98%) of the participating principals responded that staff are encouraged or required to

identify essential state standards for each grade level and subject on the high end of the

Likert Scale (from moderate to extremely large extent). Ninety-five percent (95%) of the

principals encouraged or required staff to integrate test preparation within the curriculum

throughout the year and 93% required or encouraged staff to align curriculum guides with the scope and sequence of the identified standards from a moderate extent to an extremely large extent. Differentiating instruction (90%), using the formative assessment process (92%) and working collaboratively to analyze data and create instructional plans were also encouraged or required frequently from a moderate extent to an extremely large extent.

Principals reported 62% require or encourage staff to participate in instructional rounds and 73% require or encourage the use of the Dr. Marzano's Nine Instructional Strategies from a moderate extent to an extremely large extent. Seventy-five percent (75%) of the principals reported requiring or encouraging participation in a professional learning community from a moderate extent to an extremely large extent. Over half of the principals (54%) reported requiring or encouraging staff to identify essential state standards for each grade level and subject at an extremely large extent. The extremely large extent column had high percentages in two other strategies: (a) align curriculum guides with the scope and sequence of the identified standards (39%); and (b) work collaboratively to analyze data and create instructional plans (34%).

Two strategies were marked as not being used at an extremely small extent: (a) integrate test preparation within the curriculum throughout the year; and (b) develop a coherent system of assessments that measures standards and achievement. Table 8 shows the percent of principals that encouraged or required their staff to implement the strategies on a scale indicating the extent of use.

Table 8

Results for Survey Question 3: Percent of principals that encouraged or required their staff to implement the following strategies in order to prepare for statewide testing on a scale indicating extent of use

Item	Extremely Small Extent			Moderate Extent			Extremely Large Extent
Integrate test preparation within the curriculum throughout the year	0%	3%	2%	18%	18%	35%	24%
Identify essential state standards for each grade level and subject	1%	1%	0%	8%	8%	28%	54%
Differentiate instruction	2%	2%	6%	8%	12%	40%	30%
Use the nine instructional strategies identified by Dr. Marzano	11%	8%	8%	23%	19%	19%	12%
Use the formative assessment process	1%	2%	5%	12%	22%	36%	22%
Align curriculum guides with the scope and sequence of the identified standards	2%	0%	3%	6%	19%	29%	39%
Develop a coherent system of assessments that measures standards and achievement	0%	5%	7%	20%	23%	25%	19%
Participate in instructional rounds	19%	10%	9%	17%	14%	19%	12%
Work collaboratively to analyze data and create instructional plans	1%	1%	4%	11%	17%	30%	34%
Participate in Professional Learning Communities	13%	5%	6%	17%	14%	19%	25%

Participating principals were provided an opportunity to list additional strategies that were encouraged or required in order to prepare for statewide testing that were not

listed by the researcher. The additional strategies were grouped into four categories: 16

principals listed Check 4 Learning, 11 listed additional instructional strategies, 5 added

Response to Intervention and 5 principals listed test taking strategies.

The 102 principals were asked if professional development was used to assist

teachers in preparing for statewide testing and over half (77%) responded yes. Table 9

displays the principals' responses.

Table 9

Results for Survey Question 4: Percentage of principals that use professional

development in order to assist teachers in preparing for statewide testing

Yes	77%
No	23%

The 79 principals who responded yes to Question 4 (use professional development in

order to assist teachers in preparing for statewide testing) moved on to answer the extent

to which strategies were used during professional development. All of the principals

(100%) reported analyzing student performance data as a strategy used during

professional development from a moderate extent to extremely large extent with 42%

using the strategy an extremely large extent. Provide time for collaboration that is driven

by student data and incorporate formative assessment techniques in instruction were

strategies used by 96% of the principals from a moderate to extremely large extent.

Ninety-five percent (95%) of the principals increased the amount of time for professional

development and 93% developed quality classroom assessments, aligning curriculum to

standards from a moderate to extremely large extent during professional development. 90% of the principals used the strategy to plan for differentiation of instruction while 73% of the principals established Professional Learning Communities as a strategies used from a moderate to extremely large extent during professional development. Table 10 shows the percent of principals that encouraged or required their staff to implement the strategies on a scale indicating the extent of use.

Table 10

Results for Survey Question 5: Percent of principals that encourage or require their staff to implement the following strategies in order to prepare for statewide testing on a scale indicating extent of use

Item	Extremely Small Extent			Moderate Extent			Extremely Large Extent
Develop quality classroom assessments, aligning curriculum to standards	3%	1%	3%	25%	24%	29%	15%
Provide time for collaboration that is driven by student data	0%	1%	3%	9%	23%	40%	24%
Plan for differentiation of instruction	1%	6%	0	8%	12%	40%	30%
Analyze student performance data	0%	0%	0%	9%	7%	42%	42%
Establish Professional Learning Communities	8%	10%	9%	15%	12%	23%	23%
Increase amount of professional development	1%	3%	1%	25%	28%	28%	14%
Incorporate formative assessment techniques in instruction	1%	0%	3%	22%	30%	28%	16%

The seventy-nine (79) principals were provided an opportunity to list additional strategies that were used to assist teachers in preparing for statewide testing that were not listed by the researcher. The additional strategies were grouped into four categories: 4 principals listed training of instructional strategies (new curriculum, Dr. Marzano's 9, Guided Reading), 2 listed the use of the local Educational Service Unit for training, 2 principals listed Measures of Academic Progress by Northwest Evaluation Association and 1 principal listed training by well-known people (writing).

The entire 102 participating principals were asked to identify the extent of use of implemented leadership strategies. One hundred percent (100%) of the principals responded with a moderate to extremely large extent for recruiting highly qualified staff and over half chose an extremely large extent. Ninety-eight percent (98%) of principals recognized accomplishments and celebrated successes at a moderate to extremely large extent. Ninety-seven percent (97%) of Principals maintained a consistent vision or goal for all stakeholders and developed leaders within their school at a moderate to extremely large extent. Ninety-six percent (96%) of the principals provided on-going professional development and 93% coached teachers to improve instruction and student achievement at a moderate to extremely large extent. Less than half of the principals used Michael Fullan's theory of change (32%) or McRel's Balanced Leadership Framework (47%) at a moderate to extremely large extent. Table 11 shows the percent of principals that encouraged or required their staff to implement the strategies on a scale indicating the extent of use.

Table 11

Results for Survey Question 6: Percent of principals that implement the following leadership strategies in order to prepare for statewide testing on a scale indicating extent of use

Item	Extremely Small Extent			Moderate Extent			Extremely Large Extent
Recruit highly qualified staff	0%	0%	0%	3%	11%	28%	58%
Provide on-going professional development, not a one-time presentation event	0%	1%	3%	6%	21%	33%	36%
Use of Michael Fullan's theory of change	42%	14%	12%	14%	10%	6%	2%
Coach teachers to improve instruction and student achievement	0%	3%	4%	6%	10%	43%	34%
Use of the McRel Balanced Leadership Framework	33%	11%	9%	17%	12%	10%	8%
Maintain a consistent vision or goal for all stakeholders	0%	2%	1%	2%	15%	43%	37%
Develop leaders within your school	0%	1%	2%	5%	15%	43%	34%
Recognize accomplishments/celebrate successes	0%	1%	1%	6%	15%	33%	44%

Participating principals were provided an opportunity to list additional leadership strategies that were used in order to prepare for statewide testing that were not listed by the researcher. The additional strategies were grouped into four categories: 2 principals listed team approach, 2 reported accountability, 2 listed collaboration and data analysis, and 3 used a focus on students through rewards and high expectations.

Qualitative Results

The participants for the qualitative phase of the study were selected from the 102

principals that participated in the quantitative phase. Extreme case sampling was used to

select the participants. Thirty seven (37) principals were willing to be interviewed and

five were selected because of extremely high or low scores that the researcher felt needed

further investigation. The years of experience and survey scores are shown in Table 12.

Table 12

Demographics and Survey Results of Interviewed Principals

Principal Number	Years of Experience as a Teacher	Years of Experience as a Principal	Scores on Survey for Extent of Strategy Use	Use of Professional Development to Prepare for Statewide Testing
1	16	6	High	Yes
2	5	4	Low	Yes
3	7	3	High	Yes
4	25	4	High	Yes
5	14	24	Low	No

A principal did not volunteer to be interviewed who scored themselves high on

the "extent of strategy use" and selected "no" for the "use of professional development to

prepare for statewide testing." Three out of 5 of the interviewed principals had less than

5 years of experience and only 1 out of 3 scored low on the survey for extent of strategy

use. One of the interviewed principals had more than 20 years of experience and scored

low on the survey for extent of strategy use.

As the researcher coded the transcripts, several themes emerged:

1. Ownership/teamwork

2. Focus (data, alignment)

3. Marzano strategies

4. Recognition of accomplishments

Ownership/teamwork was the major theme that emerged from the interviews. All five principals lead with the intent of staff and students "owning" the data and work to be done to improve:

1. "I knew we'd hit a goldmine when within 60 seconds of a child finishing the NeSA test, the teacher's on the horn wanting to know what their score was. That told me that had made an impact because they want to know the scores. I don't have to tell my teachers to put the information into the spreadsheet, they just do it because they want to know how proficient their kids are."
2. "And then we've also focused on ownership with the kids. We have data charts out hanging and they're numbered or a letter underneath and every kid knows their code and can see themselves in relationship to the standard. Where am I? Am I considered proficient? And I think that ownership has helped with the kids because they're pretty excited about their scores and they want to be able to beat their scores and they are trying their hardest."
3. "My school's going to make progress and I don't have the answers, but I can ask some questions and I can ask people who may know more about some things than I do. And between all of us, you know, we're going to come up with an answer. And that's how I approach it here in this building. We—it's pretty rare that I sit at a meeting and say this is going to happen. It's generally a conversation that we're having."
4. "You hire good people and kind of point them in the right direction, give them some guidance and allow them to take their own initiative. It's just a lot better for them to take that leadership and the pride in getting it done, we have some really good people at that, I think."
5. "That was one of my mistakes that I made earlier in my career was I looked at the data and just kind of told the teachers, "Hey, yours isn't good enough, you got to get better," now I actually have them look at it and allow that to more of a reflection and goal setting process."

All five of the interviewed principals experienced growth in NeSA scores, and several cited large increases (16 points). The principals cited the following as the reason for the student achievement growth:

1. "Four things: coaching, positive behavior supports, engagement strategies and being a part of the state RtI consortium which worked on reading."
2. "All the teachers. That and thing is we've got good kids. We've got a lot of local kids here and in small towns like this, you don't see a lot of folks transit."
3. "Well, I think it's identifying the areas of need and trying not to anyway overwhelm teachers with new things all the time."
4. "The combination of using the data from MAP and just emphasize doing your best on the test."
5. "Direct instruction phonics program for Kindergarten through second and then in small groups for those that need it in third through sixth grades."

All five principals also spoke to the importance of aligning curriculum to standards but the conversation quickly moved to data and the utilization of data by staff in a variety of methods to meet the needs of students: C4Learning, MAP, color-coded spreadsheets, differentiation, small group "guided" instruction in every subject area, professional development used to analyze data, the value of using data in the Response to Intervention process. Effective use of data was expected by all principals and the data provided focus for the staff. One principal that uses MAP stated,

> All students in the building take a MAP assessment three times a year at this point in time and then teachers use their own classroom based assessments to help guide instruction as well in between. And then each student gets an individual reading inventor three time a year as well.

MAP is used to analyze student needs and monitor progress.

Marzano (2001) was discussed by all five principals with varying degrees of use. Several principals were implementing Marzano's Evaluation System while others were simply using Marzano's Six Steps for Vocabulary Instruction or pieces of Marzano, like the instructional rounds. Most the principals discussed being in the early stages of implementing any pieces of Marzano:

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Just getting that common language . . . they have a lot of autonomy as far as what they do and sometimes you get somebody that's not following the curriculum the way they should. The next thing you know, you've got some gaps in your student learning. So hopefully Marzano will help us pull some of that together.

Recognition of accomplishments was discussed by the principals and the majority of the recognition came from principals praising teachers publicly through newsletters or at staff meetings. A principal stated, "We rely a lot on our teaching staff to share at staff meeting what instructional strategies they are using in the classroom and the impact that it is making in their own classroom." One of the principals recognized teachers that master instructional strategies and then other teachers are welcomed to observe in their classroom. The students are recognized most often for growth on assessments and one principal started a wall of honor for students with perfect scores on the NeSA.

The five principals shared similar reasons for not using certain strategies. The size of the school determined the use of Professional Learning Communities and instructional rounds. The principals at smaller schools felt both of these strategies were difficult to carry out with one teacher per grade level. The size of the school also determined the principals' effectiveness in recruiting and retaining qualified staff. The principals at smaller schools struggled to attract quality staff when there is little entertainment or housing. One of the five principals was familiar with both Michael Fullan's Change Theory and McRel's Balanced Leadership Framework. The principal was exposed to both through a course at a Nebraska University.

Mixed Methods Results

The quantitative part of the study captured the facts about the types of strategies encouraged and required by principals, as well as facts about the use of professional

development and leadership strategies through a survey. Table 13 displays the research

questions and what survey questions were used to collect the data:

Table 13

Data Collected to Answer Research Questions

Research Question	Data Collection
What are the primary strategies used by elementary principals in Nebraska public schools for preparing for standardized testing?	Survey question #3, #4
Has professional development been utilized by Nebraska elementary principals in order to assist teachers in the preparation for standardized testing? And if it has been used, what types of professional development?	Survey question #5, #6, #7
What leadership plans have Nebraska Public Elementary School and/or their school districts followed to prepare for standardized testing?	Survey question #8, #9

The primary strategies elementary principals in Nebraska public schools required

or encouraged staff to use for preparing for standardized testing were:

1. Identifying essential state standards for each grade level and subject

2. Integrate test preparation within the curriculum throughout the year

3. Align curriculum guides with the scope and sequence of the identified

    standards

4. Utilize the formative assessment process and work collaboratively to analyze

    data and create instructional plans

5. Differentiate instruction to meet the needs of every student at their own level

The primary strategies 77% of the participating elementary principals in Nebraska

public schools used during professional development for preparing for standardized

testing were:

1. Analyze student performance data

2. Provide time for collaboration that is driven by student data and incorporate formative assessment techniques in instruction

3. Increase amount of professional development

4. Develop quality classroom assessments, aligning curriculum to standards

5. Plan for differentiation of instruction

The primary leadership strategies used by the participating elementary principals in Nebraska public schools were:

1. Recruit highly qualified staff

2. Recognize accomplishments/celebrate successes

3. Maintain a consistent vision or goal for all stakeholders, develop leaders within your school

4. Provide on-going professional development, not a one-time presentation event

5. Coach teacher to improve instruction and student achievement

The qualitative part of the study collected the voices of elementary school principals. Principals were chosen to be interviewed from the population of public elementary school principals that answered the survey. The interviews provided a deeper understanding of the principals' quantitative answers.

The five interviewed principals did believe identifying standards and aligning the curriculum with the scope and sequence of the identified standards was essential as the first step to improving student achievement. One principal stated, "As a staff, we do lots of pre-planning to ensure the content we're required to teach by the district aligns with what will be on the assessment and try and spiral that as much as possible."

Integrating test preparation within the curriculum throughout the year was scored

high on the extent of use by principals taking the survey but little evidence was given

during the interview portion to support the integration. Only one principal could cite a

specific example of the integration of adding practice skills to the core curriculum:

> We try and make sure that we are practicing the skills that will be assessed when
> the time comes around. One of the big things that we've done is there's a
> publishing company called Evan-Moor and they publish a daily comprehension
> piece and it's basically a standardized passage with four questions, very similar to
> what you'd see on any reading test and then it goes over the same skills . . . fact
> and opinion, author's purpose, main idea . . . just to give kids as many
> opportunities to practice those skills as we can.

The formative assessment process was also scored high on the extent of use by

principals taking the survey but the interviewed principals emphasized the collaborative

work to analyze data and create instructional plans, as well as differentiation. One of the

principals expressed the frustration with the lack of resources available for teachers to

differentiate without consuming valuable time, "We want our kids to grow and improve

those scores, but unless they're practicing skills at an appropriate level for them, it's

hard." Another principal said:

> We're trying to cultivate or dredge out those areas where we need to go a mile
> deep as well so that our kids can be prepared on NeSA tests. I know one of the
> big frustrations I have is fidelity to program which obviously has its benefits but
> then differentiating instruction to meet no only curricular needs for NeSA but for
> students' individual needs.

One of the principals had a strong background in technology and the data focus was

important to him. The principal created a color coded spreadsheet to assist teachers with

data analysis:

> One of the things that I noticed was that staff were given a sheet of paper that had
> their aims with benchmark scores on it. Kids are alphabetized in that one. And
> then they're also given a piece of paper with math scores and it's a growth model
> test that shows growth over time and those scores are from low to high. And then

they're given NeSA scores. Good luck with correlation and trying to figure out how well this kid is doing? So I put together a spreadsheet that has conditional formatting, it changes colors for them and the teachers put in the data themselves.

Two of the principals discussed departmentalization to best meet the needs of students and how important the collaboration piece has become:

Every Thursday they are required to meet for an hour and then sometime throughout the week, they need to find separate hours throughout the week in which they can either meet to go over data or they meet to plan. I'm flexible on which hour they want to plan and which hour they meet to meet to go over student data and talk about instructional choices for the week.

Seventy-seven percent (77%) of the participating principals indicated using professional development for preparing for standardized testing on the survey. The importance of collaboration and analyzing student data was present throughout the survey and the interviews. Increasing the amount of professional development was scored high (extent of use) on the survey but only one principal shared an example of an actual calendar change to accommodate the need: "We expanded to five late starts. We had not done that before. They are spread out throughout the year and then we have about five full days of in-service."

The leadership strategies shared by the five principals during the interview were consistent with the survey results. All five expressed the need to hire highly qualified staff for not only strong instruction but also to build a strong staff with effective leaders.

Recognizing accomplishments and celebrating successes was also ranked high and all five shared similar methods:

personally recognizing as far as one-on-one and staff meetings. We try to get the press to jump on anything good. Teachers, a lot of them are motivated intrinsically or they just like to do it. Obviously it's not the money. But they do like being recognized and that's important, so that's worth a lot of money.

Recognizing accomplishments in newsletters, through the press and staff meetings were

common among the five principals.

The five principals did not discuss maintaining a consistent vision or goal for all

stakeholders but the vision was evident when the principals discussed the on-going

professional development, not a one-time presentation:

> So, the goal is by the end of the training, the teacher can go the next day and
> apply this information into a lesson. It's not asking them to go and spend four
> hours on their own trying to do it.

> We started two years ago with a team of five members. Then we decided to have
> the Marzano trainers come to us. We just finished our third day of training and
> will have two more follow-up days next year.

> For the last two year's it's been guided math (vocabulary portion). This year
> we're focusing on Marzano's six steps for vocabulary instruction.

Coaching teachers to improve instruction and student achievement was high on

the survey and strong in the interviews as well. One principal uses the Educational

Service Unit to assist with coaching: "I've pulled in coaching from the ESU to come in

and give us guidance with either engagement strategies or reading or math." Another

principal felt coaching was a battle:

> if they buy in, they can be successful but sometimes you have that person in a
> small school, like I say, we have such autonomy a lot of times and they think they
> know best. So it's hard to coach them out of what they think.

Summary

A web-based survey was sent to 524 public elementary school principals in the

state of Nebraska and 102 surveys were completed. The results showed the strategies

being used by Nebraska public elementary school principals included identification of

essential state standards and the alignment of curriculum guides with the scope and

sequence of the identified standards. Working collaboratively to analyze data, create

instruction plans and differentiating to meet individual student needs were also strategies used to prepare for statewide testing. Public elementary school principals in the state of Nebraska are encouraging ownership and teamwork among the staff to improve student achievement and are working to recruit highly qualified staff. Five of the participating principals were selected through extreme case sampling for interviews and the interviews clarified the results of the survey. The interviewed principals shared varying reasons for the improvement in their schools but data analysis and creating ownership were strong themes in the interviews as well as the surveys.

Chapter 5

Discussion

Introduction

The central research question for the study was: What is the role of Nebraska

public elementary school principals (grades K-5) in leading and engaging teachers in the

use of preparation for state-wide testing? A web-based survey was sent to 524 public

elementary school principals in the state of Nebraska. The survey included eight

questions and two were open-ended, one required a yes/no response and three asked

participants to rate the extent of use on a Likert scale from "Extremely Small Extent" to

"Extremely Large Extent." Five principals were chosen from the responding 102

principals to be interviewed in order to clarify the results of the survey.

Discussion

Knowledge about the role of the Nebraska public elementary school principals in

leading and engaging teachers in the use of preparation for state-wide testing has been

gained as a result of this study.   The researcher was not surprised to discover that data

analysis and collaboration were strategies used across the state of Nebraska to improve

student achievement. The focus on student performance data analysis has created a focus

on differentiation as well. The survey results showed differentiation as one of the top

five strategies used by principals but the differentiation is strongly tied to meeting the

individual student needs discovered in the data analysis.

Another connection to data analysis was Response to Intervention (RtI).

Response to Intervention was not discovered in the literature as an effective strategy to

improve student achievement but RtI in some form or another was mentioned in all five

of the interviews and added as an additional strategy by many of the participants on the survey. The individual student needs that were being identified through the data analysis were then being addressed in the Response to Intervention process through interventions and monitoring.

The interviews not only provided clarity for the survey answers but provided the researcher with background about the principal's vision. In two of the interviews, the researcher could sense the intensity and determination of the principal to increase student achievement. The researcher could hear pride in all of the interviews but two of the principals truly had ownership and were excited about the path the school was taking. One disappointment for the researcher was one of the interviews where high student achievement was being experienced and when asked what was leading to the success, the principal shared that the students in the school are essentially "good" kids. The school still was working towards improvement but the intensity was not present. The intensity was most evident when the principals were discussing data analysis or the ownership taking place with staff and students.

The team approach was shared in all five of the interviews and re-surfaced at different times throughout the interview. The principals strongly believed that staff had to "buy into" the process before improvement would be made. The team approach was mentioned when discussing data analysis, professional development and leadership strategies. Decisions were made as a school whenever possible and conversations were held to involve staff in the decision-making process. The researcher believes the belief in ownership is strong across the state of Nebraska but some districts do not allow principals to move away from the top-down decision making process.

The researcher was surprised that 100% of the principals did not recruit highly qualified staff at an "extremely large extent" but throughout the interviews the principals explained that highly qualified staff were easier to hire in some locations than others, the word "recruit" changed the meaning for participating principals.

Two of the interviewed principals shared the success their school has experienced through purchased programs. One program was specifically for reading comprehension and the other for phonics. Programs were added on the survey under additional strategies as well. The researcher was surprised that the principals felt the program itself had a major impact on student achievement as opposed to the teacher "buy-in" and fidelity.

The interviewed principals were asked to identify the reason they felt their school was experiencing growth in student achievement. All five cited different reasons (see pp. 60-61) and there was no common thread. The answers varied from professional development, good kids, a small number of initiatives, data use, and a purchased program. One principal's quote summarized the reason for success, "Yeah, we have been very focused and fortunate that the way we've gone about it, you know—it's just the way it happened. The path that we took happened to be a good path." The researcher does not believe luck is the prevailing factor but the focus and ownership/teamwork taking place in these schools is making a difference.

Future Research

The extreme case sampling used to select the interview participants created additional questions for the researcher. Did the years of experience of the principal have an impact on the extent of use of the strategies? The veteran principal (24 years of experience as a principal) and the new principal (4 years of experience as a principal)

both scored low on the survey for the extent of strategy use. Did the number of years spent in the classroom or the number of years away from the classroom impact the scores? The new principal had only taught for a total of 5 years and the veteran principal had been away from the classroom for 24. More research could be conducted to discover if the age of the principal has an impact on the chosen strategies and whether the number of years since the principal was a classroom teacher has an impact on the chosen strategies.

The Response to Intervention (RtI) process was mentioned frequently by the participating principals and yet RtI was not one of the effective strategies found in the literature review. More research needs to be conducted to discover why RtI is not listed in the literature when the participating principals felt RtI was helping the schools identify and support struggling students. One reason for the lack of literature could be the inconsistency of the RtI process at each school. The five interviewed principals each described a different process for RtI at their school.

More research could be conducted on the ownership/teamwork theme discovered in this study. The theme was present throughout the interviews and the survey but principals could not identify how they created ownership in their school. One of the principals could identify that one of his leadership skills was to involve the staff in the decision making process to create ownership but the majority of the principals did not feel responsible for the ownership and cited good staff or luck.

Summary

The study revealed strong data analysis and collaboration strategies in the participating public Nebraska elementary schools as well as connections to differentiation

and the Response to Intervention process. The participating principals also created a team approach in their schools and searched for ways to create "buy in." The five interviewed principals did not cite common reasons for the school's growth in student achievement; however, the researcher felt more research conducted on the ownership/teamwork theme could possibly support the reasons why student achievement increased in the schools.

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Appendix A

Survey Cover E-mail

Dear Elementary Principal,

The introduction of Nebraska's new single, statewide testing system known as Nebraska State Accountability (NeSA) has created a new opportunity for schools across the state to showcase their achievements. The unknowns of statewide testing are worrisome for all involved and with your assistance, I hope to discover the strategies schools are using to prepare for the assessment and develop a resource for administrators to access.

I am a doctoral student at the University of Nebraska at Lincoln and I am conducting a study in order to discover the approaches elementary schools across the state of Nebraska are using in response to the introduction of NeSA. Not only will your input be crucial, but you may also receive a copy of the study, which will include the strategies being utilized at the elementary level.

Participation in this study will require approximately 10 minutes. You will be asked to answer an on-line survey. There are no known risks or discomforts associated with this research. The topics in the survey may upset some participants. You may decline to answer any or all questions and you may terminate your involvement at any time if you choose.

There will be no direct benefit to you for your participation in this study. However, we hope that the information obtained from this study may provide understanding of how Nebraska elementary principals are preparing for statewide testing.

Every effort will be made by the researchers to preserve your confidentiality including the following:

1. The researcher will utilize the assignment of code names/numbers for schools to assist with follow-up. The code list will be destroyed as soon as surveys are ended.
2. The researcher and the members of the researcher's committee will review the researcher's collected data. Information from this research will be used solely for the purpose of this study and any publications that may result from this study. All participants involved in this study will not be identified and their anonymity will be maintained.

Opportunity to Ask Questions: Sometimes participants have questions or concerns about their rights. In this case, please contact the UNL Research Compliance Services office at 402-472-6965 or irb@unl.edu. You may ask any questions concerning this research and have those questions answered before agreeing to participate in or during the study:

Study investigator: Carrie Kolar- Phone: 308-389-3993, Email: ckolar@gips.org

University of Nebraska at Lincoln Advisor: Jody C. Isernhagen, Ed.D. Phone- 402-472-1088, Email: jisernhagen3@unl.edu

Your participation in this study is voluntary. It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part in this study. If you decide to take part in this study, you are still free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason and without negative consequences. Should you withdraw, your data will be eliminated from the study and will be destroyed.

You are voluntarily making a decision whether or not to participate in this research study. By completing and submitting your survey responses, you have given your consent to participate in this research. You should print a copy of this page for your records.

Thank you for your input and here is the link to the survey: (LINK)

Sincerely,

Carrie L. Kolar

Appendix B

Follow-up E-mail

Dear Elementary Principal,

Four weeks ago an e-mail with a link to a questionnaire was sent to you seeking the approaches you and your school are using in response to NeSA.

If you have already completed and returned the questionnaire, please accept my sincere thanks. If not, please do so at your earliest convenience. It is extremely important that your strategies be included in the study. I have included the survey information and link for you:

The introduction of Nebraska's new single, statewide testing system known as Nebraska State Accountability (NeSA) has created a new opportunity for schools across the state to showcase their achievements. The unknowns of statewide testing are worrisome for all involved and with your assistance, I hope to discover the strategies schools are using to prepare for the assessment and develop a resource for administrators to access.

I am a doctoral student at the University of Nebraska at Lincoln and I am conducting a study in order to discover the approaches elementary schools across the state of Nebraska are using in response to the introduction of NeSA. Not only will your input be crucial, but you may also receive a copy of the study, which will include the strategies being utilized at the elementary level.

Participation in this study will require approximately 10 minutes. You will be asked to answer an on-line survey. There are no known risks or discomforts associated with this research. The topics in the survey may upset some participants. You may decline to answer any or all questions and you may terminate your involvement at any time if you choose.

There will be no direct benefit to you for your participation in this study. However, we hope that the information obtained from this study may provide understanding of how Nebraska elementary principals are preparing for statewide testing.

Every effort will be made by the researchers to preserve your confidentiality including the following:

1. The researcher will utilize the assignment of code names/numbers for schools to assist with follow-up. The code list will be destroyed as soon as surveys are ended.

2. The researcher and the members of the researcher's committee will review the researcher's collected data. Information from this research will be used solely for the purpose of this study and any publications that may result from this study. All participants involved in this study will not be identified and their anonymity will be maintained.

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Study investigator: Carrie Kolar- Phone: 308-389-3993, Email: ckolar@gips.org

University of Nebraska at Lincoln Advisor: Jody C. Isernhagen, Ed.D. Phone- 402-472-1088, Email: jisernhagen3@unl.edu

Your participation in this study is voluntary. It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part in this study. If you decide to take part in this study, you are still free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason and without negative consequences. Should you withdraw, your data will be eliminated from the study and will be destroyed.

You are voluntarily making a decision whether or not to participate in this research study. By completing and submitting your survey responses, you have given your consent to participate in this research. You should print a copy of this page for your records.

Thank you for your input and here is the link to the survey: (LINK)

Sincerely,

Carrie L. Kolar

Appendix C

Survey Questionnaire

Public Elementary Principal Survey Concerning

Preparation for Statewide Testing

Default Question Block

The Role of Nebraska Public Elementary School Principals in the Preparation for Statewide Assessment

The purpose of this study is to examine the role of Nebraska public elementary school principals when preparing for statewide testing and the strategies used by principals to prepare students for statewide assessment.

Please answer the questions below and on the following pages.

Thank you for your time!

<u>Professional Experience</u>

How many years (through 2013-14) have you been a classroom teacher?

How many years (through 2013-14) have you been a principal?

<u>Encouraged/Required Staff Use</u>

Please indicate to what extent you encourage or require your staff to implement the following strategies in order to prepare for statewide testing.

Respond to the items on this scale from extremely large extent to extremely small extent:

	Extremely Small Extent			Moderate Extent			Extremely Large Extent
1.Integrate test preparation within the curriculum throughout the year	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
2.Identify essential state standards for each grade level and subject	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
3.Differentiate instruction	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
4.Use the nine instructional strategies identified by Dr. Marzano (McRel 9)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
5.Use the formative assessment process	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
6.Align curriculum guides with the scope and sequence of the identified standards	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
7.Develop a coherent system of assessments that measures standards achievement	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
8.Participate in instructional rounds	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

9.Work collaboratively to analyze data and create instructional plans	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
10.Participate in Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

List any additional strategies you encourage or require your staff to implement in order to prepare for statewide testing:

[ ]

Have you used professional development in order to assist teachers in preparing for statewide testing?

○ Yes

○ No

Professional Development

Please indicate to what extent you use following strategies during professional development in order to prepare for statewide testing.

Respond to the items on this scale from extremely large extent to extremely small extent:

	Extremely Small Extent			Moderate Extent			Extremely Large Extent
1.Develop quality classroom assessments, aligning curriculum	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

to standards

2.Provide time for
collaboration that is
driven by student   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○
data

3.Plan for
differentiation of   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○
instruction

4.Analyze student
performance data   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○

5.Establish
Professional
Learning
Communities   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○
(PLCs)

6.Increase amount
of professional
development   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○

7.Incorporate
formative
assessment   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○
techniques in
instruction

List additional strategies used during professional development in order to prepare for statewide testing:

```
[                                                          ]
[                                                          ]
```

Block 1

87

Leadership Strategies

Please indicate to what extent you use the following leadership strategies in order to prepare for statewide testing.

Respond to the items on this scale from extremely large extent to extremely small extent:

	Extremely Small Extent			Moderate Extent			Extremely Large Extent
1.Recruit highly qualified staff	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
2.Provide on-going professional development, not a one-time presentation event	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
3.Use of Michael Fullan's theory of change	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
4.Coach teachers to improve instruction and student achievement	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
5.Use of the McRel Balanced Leadership Framework	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
6.Maintain a consistent vision or goal for all stakeholders	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
7.Develop leaders within your school	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

8.Recognize

accomplishments/celebrate   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○
successes

List additional leadership strategies you use in order to prepare for statewide testing:

[text box]

Are you willing to participate in an interview?

○ yes

○ no

If you are willing to participate in an interview, please provide your name, e-mail address and phone number:

First and last name   [text box]

E-mail address   [text box]

Phone number with area   [text box]
code

Appendix D

Consent Letter

Dear Elementary Principal,

As you are aware, as part of my doctoral studies at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, I am completing a study to analyze the strategies encouraged by principals to prepare for statewide testing. I would like to thank you for completing the questionnaire and invite you to participate in an individual interview.

The details of the study are outlined in the enclosed INFORMED CONSENT FORM. Please take this opportunity to carefully review the document. You will also find contact information on the form if you have any questions.

If you are interested in participating in the research project, please complete the form electronically and return it to via email by _____.

Your participation will enhance the understanding of how elementary principals in Nebraska prepare schools for statewide testing. It should be a very interesting study and I hope that you are willing to participate.

Sincerely,

Carrie Kolar

A Mixed Methods Study of Nebraska

Elementary Principals and Statewide Testing

Purpose of the Study: Nebraska has joined the nation's schools in the testing focus promoted by No Child Left Behind. For the first time, students' scores on standardized achievement tests are now measuring the quality of education in Nebraska. This study will reveal the role of public elementary school principals in Nebraska in statewide testing.

Procedures/Methods: Participation in this study will require approximately 45-60 minutes of your time, and is completely voluntary. One-on-one interviews will be conducted with an interview protocol using telephone calls or in person. The interviews will be audio recorded with your permission and then transcribed with the identity of the participants kept confidential. You will have the opportunity to review the transcription of your interview via an emailed word document to verify the accuracy of the interview and your statements.

Potential Risks to the Participants: The risks and discomforts associated with this study are minimal. The topics in the survey may upset some participants. You may decline to answer any or all questions and you may terminate your involvement at any time if you choose.

Benefits: There will be no direct benefit to you for your participation in this study. However, we hope that the information obtained from this study may provide understanding of how Nebraska elementary principals are preparing for statewide testing.

Confidentiality: Every effort will be made by the researchers to preserve your confidentiality including the following:

1. The researcher will utilize the assignment of code names/numbers for participants that will be used on all researcher notes and documents.

2. The researcher and the members of the researcher's committee will review the researcher's collected data. Information from this research will be used solely for the purpose of this study and any publications that may result from this study. All participants involved in this study will not be identified and their anonymity will be maintained.

3. Each participant will be given a transcribed copy of the interview to check for accuracy. The records will be destroyed one year after the interview.

Compensation to the Participants: There is no monetary compensation to you for your participation in this study.

Opportunity to Ask Questions: Sometimes participants have questions or concerns about their rights. In this case, please contact the UNL Research Compliance Services office at 402-472-6965 or irb@unl.edu. You may ask any questions concerning this research and have those questions answered before agreeing to participate in or during the study:

Study investigator: Carrie Kolar- Phone: 308-389-3993, Email: ckolar@gips.org

University of Nebraska at Lincoln Advisor: Jody C. Isernhagen, Ed.D. Phone- 402-472-1088, Email: jisernhagen3@unl.edu

Freedom for the Participants to Withdraw from the Study: Your participation in this study is voluntary. It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part in this study. If you decide to take part in this study, you are still free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason and without negative consequences. Should you withdraw, your data will be eliminated from the study and will be destroyed.

Participant Consent and the Right to Keep a Copy of the Consent Letter: You are voluntarily making a decision whether or not to participate in this research study. Your signature certifies that you have decided to participate having read and understood the information presented. Please print a copy of this consent form for you to keep.

_____ Check if you agree to be audio taped during the interview.

*Signature of Participant:*_____ *Date:*_____

Appendix E

Qualitative Interview Protocol

Qualitative Interview Protocol

(Complete/Sign Informed Consent First) Thank you for consenting to the interview. I know your time is valuable so I will not take more than an hour of your time. I am using today's interview as research that will be included in my dissertation through the University of Nebraska. Your name will not be used in the study and the information that you share with me will be only used for the study.

I will tape the interview and then make a transcript to share with you to ensure that I have accurate information. I will destroy the taping of the interview and the transcript one year from today. You may withdraw from my study at any point.

The interview is a follow-up from the on-line survey that is studying the role of Nebraska public elementary school principals in the preparation for statewide testing.

Principal's Name _____

Principal's School _____

Date/Time_____

Years of experience: _____   Years at the current school: _____

1. Which of the strategies used by staff at your school to prepare for standardized testing were the most effective in your opinion? Why? Least effective? Why?

2. Which types of professional development offered at your school to prepare for standardized testing were the most effective in your opinion? Why? Least effective? Why?

3. Which types of leadership plans implemented by your school and/or district were the most effective in your opinion? Why? Least effective? Why?

4. Who determines which strategies will be encouraged/required/offered in your school? And at the district level?

5. What data is available supporting the successful use of the strategies at your school? And at the district level?

Appendix F

McRel Approval

M c REL
Making a Difference

Carrie L. Kolar
1439 Meadow Road
Grand Island, NE 68803

Permission to Use McREL Material

December 9, 2013

Permission is hereby granted to Carrie Kolar to use in the dissertation that she is writing the following material which was published by McREL:

Figure A.1: The Framework for Instructional Planning, pp. xvi from *Classroom instruction that works: Research-based strategies for increasing student achievement.*

Figure 4.2: 21 Responsibilities Listed in Order of Correlation with Student Academic Achievement, p. 63 from *School leadership that works: From research to results.*

We understand that the figure and table will be reprinted as part of the dissertation. The figure and table should be marked as to the source of the material and include the statement "Reprinted by permission of McREL." The bibliography should include a full citation as follows:

Marzano, R. J., Waters, T., & McNulty, B. A. (2005). *School leadership that works: From research to results*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Dean, C. B., Stone, B., Hubbell, E., & Pitler, H. (2012). *Classroom instruction that works: Research-based strategies for increasing student achievement* (2nd ed.). Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

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Please send McREL a copy of the completed dissertation for our records.

Sincerely,

Maura McGrath
Knowledge Management Specialist

RE: dissertation permission (Thread:1234453)   Carrie x

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to me

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Thank you for your interest in ASCD and good luck with your dissertation.

Regards, Katy

KATY WOGEC · Senior Paralegal
    1703 N. Beauregard Street · Alexandria, VA 22311-1714
P 703-575-5749 · F 703-575-3926 · **www.ascd.org** · **www.wholechildeducation.org**

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From: Carrie Kolar [mailto:ckolar@gips.org]
Sent: Sunday, February 02, 2014 8:00 PM
To: permissions@ascd.org
Subject: dissertation permission (Thread:1234453)

I would like to request permission to use Figure A.1, The Framework for Instructional Planning, p. xvi, from Classroom Instruction that Works: Research-based Strategies for Increasing Student Achievement by Dean, Hubbell, Pitler and Stone. The figure will be used in my dissertation for the University of Nebraska at Lincoln. The Copyright Clearance Center was unable to grant the request for republication with the current agreement.

Sincerely, Carrie L. Kolar

Appendix G

IRB Approval

Sent By: IRB NUgrant System
Sent On: 06/14/2014 02:53 pm
Reference: Workflow - 105248

Message:
June 9, 2014

Carrie Kolar
Department of Educational Administration

Jody Isernhagen
Department of Educational Administration
132 TEAC, UNL, 68588-0360

IRB Number: 20140614390 EX
Project ID: 14390
Project Title: The Role of Nebraska Public Elementary School Principals in the Preparation for Statewide Testing

Dear Carrie:

This letter is to officially notify you of the certification of exemption of your project by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the Protection of Human Subjects. It is the Board's opinion that you have provided adequate safeguards for the rights and welfare of the participants in this study based on the information provided. Your proposal is in compliance with this institution's Federal Wide Assurance 00002258 and the DHHS Regulations for the Protection of Human Subjects (45 CFR 46) and has been classified as Exempt Category 2.

You are authorized to implement this study as of the Date of Exemption Determination: 06/09/2014. This approval is Valid Until: 06/08/2015.

1. The stamped and approved informed consent documents have been uploaded to NUgrant (files with â€"Approved.pdf in the file name). Please distribute these documents to participants. If you need to make changes to the documents, please submit the revised documents to the IRB for review and approval prior to using them.

We wish to remind you that the principal investigator is responsible for reporting to this Board any of the following events within 48 hours of the event:

*   Any serious event (including on-site and off-site adverse events, injuries, side effects, deaths, or other problems) which in the opinion of the local investigator was unanticipated, involved risk to subjects or others, and was possibly related to the research procedures;
*   Any serious accidental or unintentional change to the IRB-approved protocol that involves risk or has the potential to recur;
*   Any publication in the literature, safety monitoring report, interim result or other finding that indicates an unexpected change to the risk/benefit ratio of the research;
*   Any breach in confidentiality or compromise in data privacy related to the subject or others; or
*   Any complaint of a subject that indicates an unanticipated risk or that cannot be resolved by the research staff.

This project should be conducted in full accordance with all applicable sections of the IRB Guidelines and you should notify the IRB immediately of any proposed changes that may affect the exempt status of your research project. You should report any unanticipated problems involving risks to the participants or others to the Board.

If you have any questions, please contact the IRB office at 472-6965.

Sincerely,

Becky R. Freeman, CIP
for the IRB