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# Factors That Influence Accreditation in Nebraska Public Districts and Schools

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FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE ACCREDITATION IN NEBRASKA PUBLIC  
DISTRICTS AND SCHOOLS

by

David A. Gibbons

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of  
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Under the Supervision of Professors Brent Cejda and Jody Isernhagen

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FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE ACCREDITATION IN NEBRASKA PUBLIC  
DISTRICTS AND SCHOOLS

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University of Nebraska, 2017

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Public schools and districts in Nebraska are required to be accredited. The Nebraska Department of Education allows two methods to reach accreditation, the Nebraska Frameworks model and AdvancED Accreditation model. This study examined the factors that drive accreditation activities in Nebraska public schools and districts. It sought to answer questions regarding the importance of the two models' policies and procedures, the actions that schools took in response to external visits and what factors went into choosing an accreditation model.

The purpose of this quantitative descriptive study was to determine the critical factors that influenced accredited public schools in Nebraska and to identify what factors played the strongest roles in determining which accreditation method schools or districts chose. In an electronic survey, teachers and administrators were asked to provide their perceptions regarding accreditation procedures in their schools.

It was found that there were many similarities between schools that follow AdvancED Accreditation and schools that follow Nebraska Frameworks. For example, AdvancED schools need to meet published standards while Nebraska Frameworks schools need to meet criteria on a rubric. Participants from both sets of schools rated the standards or rubric as being moderately important to their accreditation procedure. Both

sets of schools expressed similar responses to their external visits as well. The majority of schools met to discuss their visit, engaged in professional development and created formal action plans, but very few did any formal follow-up of their visit.

The results of this study demonstrated the need for further study. An in-depth qualitative analysis of a small number of schools to determine why these schools chose the accreditation model could add to the body of knowledge of accreditation in Nebraska. During this study, it came to light that at least one school has changed their accreditation method from AdvancED to Frameworks. A study to determine why schools would change could also be significant.

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Overview**

#### **Introduction**

According to state statute, all public schools in the state of Nebraska that provide elementary and/or secondary education must be accredited. In order to be accredited, schools must comply with 92 NAC 10, the rules and regulations that govern standards and procedures for the accreditation of all public schools and any nonpublic schools that request state accreditation. Districts/schools may also choose to be accredited by the AdvancED accreditation agency (Nebraska Department of Education, 2012b). Regardless of the method that school leaders choose, schools and districts spend time, money and effort on preparing for an external visit in which trained personnel come in to the school to examine the plans, policies and procedures that are in place to run each school in the district. Both accreditation visits are like a complete audit of the school or district. So the question remains, what makes a Nebraska school or district choose one accreditation method over the other?

Nebraska consists of 245 public school districts as of the 2015 – 2016 school year, ranging in size from the smallest district with about 56 students to the largest district with about 49,840 students (Nebraska Department of Education, 2016). Private schools can also seek accreditation but this study was limited to public schools. As of the 2016 – 2017 school year, Nebraska did not have charter schools. For the 2016 school year, Nebraska's public school graduation rate was 89.27%.

## **Conceptual Framework**

Since the earliest colonial times, the people of this nation have concerned themselves with providing a quality education for young people. The rules, regulations, and definition of quality regarding public schooling have evolved over the years, but the desire for improvement has been fairly constant. For example, a Massachusetts law of 1642 called for officials in each town to determine if children were being properly trained and taught “to read and understand the principles of religion and the capital laws of the country” (Cubberly, 1919, p. 17), even though home instruction and apprenticeship were the main schooling at the time. Just five years later, the foundation of the American public school system and the states’ involvement in that system were laid with the Massachusetts law of 1647. This law called for the establishment of public schools in towns with sufficient households (Cubberly, 1919). In his history of education in Massachusetts, George Martin enumerated the principles behind these laws (Martin, 1904, p. 14).

1. The universal education of youth is essential to the well-being of the state.
2. The obligation to furnish this education rests primarily on the parent.
3. The state has a right to enforce this obligation.
4. The state may fix a standard which shall determine the kind of education and the minimum amount.

The ideas in these principles have evolved over the years. By the time of the Revolution, the purpose of public education moved away from understanding the principles of religion and more toward the idea that it is in the state’s best interest to educate children (Cubberly, 1919). This idea is further demonstrated in Thomas

Jefferson's letter to Uriah Forrest where he wrote, "Educate and inform the whole mass of the people . . . they are the only sure reliance for the preservation of our liberty" (Jefferson, 1787). Finally, the importance of public education to the founding fathers was seen in various land ordinances of the 1780's. Land that was gained from the Revolution needed to be surveyed and then sold off in order to maintain order and raise money in the new territories. In these land ordinances, congress set aside land for the purpose of public education (Cubberly, 1919).

The early 1800's saw the rise of the common school which was run through increased governmental activity at the state level. The common school would provide for an education for all, not just the wealthy (Urban & Wagoner, 2014). Known as the "Father of the common school" (Urban & Wagoner, 2014, p. 92), Horace Mann advocated strongly for common schools as the secretary of the Massachusetts Board of Education. He appealed to the wealthy by writing that educated workers were "safe and malleable" while uneducated workers were "dangerous and recalcitrant" (Urban & Wagoner, 2014, p. 94). The conceptual framework of this study is based on the development of the common school and the continuous effort to improve public education, which is best represented in contemporary times by accreditation efforts resulting in a school improvement process that meets standards established by the respective states.

### **A Brief History of Accreditation in Nebraska**

In the late 1800's, colleges and universities were finding variations in secondary school programs across the country. In Nebraska, the University of Nebraska established

a system of accreditation in 1884 in order to bring uniformity to the curriculum and instruction in Nebraska schools so that graduates of accredited secondary schools in Nebraska would be prepared for university level studies (Limoges, 2001). Students who graduated from an accredited school would not have to take an entrance exam for college. By the early 1900's the University of Nebraska was accrediting schools while the Nebraska Department of Public instruction was approving schools. Accredited schools met a much more stringent set of requirements than approved schools (Limoges, 2001). Established in 1895 (Newman, 1996), the North Central Association became another method of secondary school accreditation in the state of Nebraska. Achieving North Central Association accreditation was also a distinctive honor in the ten-state region in which Nebraska operated (Limoges, 2001). The Nebraska Department of Public Instruction set up approval of schools because some schools may not have been able to have the facilities to offer all the programs that were required under the standards set up by the University or the North Central Association, however, minimum standards still needed to be met (Thomas, 1916).

There is however, a large number of schools surrounded by conditions which do not make it practicable to comply with all of the requirements for accreditation. Many of such schools are unable to carry a full program of studies and must be content with nine, ten or eleven grades and with less substantial facilities for executing the program. It is thought best by the department, in justice to the children who live in such districts, to apply such effective standards as may be reasonably be met and which may be conducive to the educational progress of the youth of the state. (Thomas, 1916, p. 66)

By the mid 1920's, the University of Nebraska stopped inspecting schools, even though they continued to set the standards of accreditation, and accepted reports from the Department of Public Instruction. The regulations and standards of accreditation and

approval continued to evolve over the next few decades. The Soviet Union's launch of Sputnik in 1957 helped push the nation toward educational reform and a new standard of academic excellence (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). After the publication of *A Nation at Risk* by the National Commission on Excellence in Education, Nebraska Governor Bob Kerrey created the Nebraska Governor's Task Force, which included educators, business leaders and state senators. The recommendations of this Task Force were written into state law and became the basis of new Department of Education rules for approval and accreditation (Limoges, 2001).

### **Accreditation Procedures**

Public schools and districts in Nebraska have two methods for achieving accreditation, according to the Nebraska Department of Education website on Accreditation and School Improvement.

**Accreditation – Rule 10, *Regulations and Procedures for the Accreditation of Schools*.** Accredited schools must comply with 92 NAC 10, the rules and regulations which govern standards and procedures for the accreditation of all public schools and any nonpublic schools that request state accreditation. Districts/schools may also choose to be accredited by the AdvancED/North Central Association accrediting body. (Nebraska Department of Education, 2016)

Both methods are based on the principle of continuous improvement in schools and both methods require external visits at least once every five years. Many other features are similar (AdvancED, 2015; Nebraska Department of Education, 2012c).

The Nebraska Frameworks Model consists of four parts: creating the profile, setting the goals, planning to improve, and implementing the plan. These four parts create a continuous cycle of improvement. A continuous improvement technical assistance rubric is provided to help schools and external visitation teams judge how well

they are meeting the seven standards (Nebraska Department of Education, 2012c). These seven standards include:

1. vision and purpose,
2. governance and leadership,
3. teaching and learning,
4. documenting and using results,
5. resources and support systems,
6. stakeholder communications and relationships, and
7. commitment to continuous improvement.

The Nebraska Framework's External Team Visit guide outlines the report that is required after the external visit (Nebraska Department of Education, 2012a). The report calls for the external team to provide commendations and recommendations regarding the overall improvement process as well as provide comments and recommendations for consideration of the host school regarding school improvement goals and action plans.

AdvancED was formed in 2006, with the merger of the North Central Association (NCA) and the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools along with the National Study of School Evaluation (NSSE) (AdvancED, 2016). Schools or school systems are accredited for a five-year term. In order to earn or maintain AdvancED accreditation, a school or school system must follow the Accreditation Standards, policies and procedures; host an external review at least once every five years; submit required documents prior to the external review; submit a progress report within two years of the external review; and pay all accreditation fees as required (AdvancED, 2015).

With their unification, NCA, SACS, and NSSE created Standards of Quality for schools and districts. According to AdvancED, the standards were researched-based statements that describe what conditions should exist in quality schools and systems. The original seven standards were revised and condensed to five standards in 2011 (AdvancED, 2011).

- Standard 1: Purpose and Direction  
The system maintains and communicates at all levels of the organization a purpose and direction for continuous improvement that commit to high expectations for learning as well as shared values and beliefs about teaching and learning.
- Standard 2: Governance and Leadership  
The system operates under governance and leadership that promote and support student performance and school effectiveness.
- Standard 3: Teaching and Assessing for Learning  
The system's curriculum, instructional design, and assessment practices guide and ensure teacher effectiveness and student learning across all grades and courses.
- Standard 4: Resources and Support Systems  
The system has resources and provides services in all schools that support its purpose and direction to ensure success for all students.
- Standard 5: Using Results for Continuous Improvement  
The system implements a comprehensive assessment system that generates a range of data about student learning and system effectiveness and uses the results to guide continuous improvement.

These five standards are broken down into quality indicators and performance levels that detail the expectations of schools seeking accreditation. There is a total of 35 indicators split amongst the five standards (AdvancED, 2011).

When comparing the two accreditation methods, one will find that they are very similar in that they require schools and districts to submit a significant amount of



evidence to demonstrate that they are meeting rigorous standards for quality. Every five years, each accredited school must submit evidence to an outside group of educators that perform an external visit in the district. Based on the evidence and observations during the visit, the External Team scores the district on the five standards (AdvancED, 2015; Nebraska Department of Education, 2012b). The AdvancED protocol then goes a step further by having the External Team assign improvement priorities based on the low scoring standards that the school or district needs to address to make significant improvements. Within two years of the visit, schools must submit evidence that they completed or implemented the required actions (AdvancED, 2015). Obviously, this process can create a great deal of work for schools and districts and those schools and districts that struggle with the process can face probationary status and possible loss of accreditation, although only one school district in Clayton County, GA has lost its accreditation in the last 40 years (Samuels, 2011).

### **Statement of the Problem**

Every public school system in the state of Nebraska is required by law to be accredited and there are two ways for schools to meet that accreditation (Nebraska Department of Education, 2012b). Schools can choose whether they follow the Nebraska Frameworks Accreditation model or the national accreditation model of AdvancED (Nebraska Department of Education, 2016). Many commonalities exist between both methods such as the development of continuous school improvement plans and both have standards that drive the process. The standards themselves are very similar. Finally, both

accreditation models require an outside group to evaluate the school or district using a rubric to determine how well the school or district is meeting the standards.

While there are similarities between the two accreditation models, there are also some major differences. One difference is the cost. Schools and districts do not pay for Nebraska Frameworks accreditation, but there are accreditation fees associated with AdvancED (AdvancED, 2015). A Nebraska Frameworks external visit will last between one to two days while an AdvancED visit will take two and a half days. One of the most significant differences between the two accreditation methods is that the external team for a Nebraska Frameworks visit will provide the host school or district with recommendations for them to consider, however, the external team for an AdvancED visit will leave the school or district with at least one improvement priority. Additionally, within two years after the visit, the AdvancED school or district is required to submit an Accreditation Progress Report detailing how they are meeting the needs of the improvement priority (Lange, 2014).

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this study was to determine the critical factors of accreditation that influence Nebraska AdvancED and Nebraska Frameworks Accredited public schools and districts. Considering that Nebraska public schools and districts must be accredited and they must choose between the two methods, one may ask what factors influence that choice. Therefore, a secondary purpose of this study will be to identify what factors play the strongest roles in determining which accreditation method school districts choose.

The central question for this study was, “What are the most important factors that influence accreditation in Nebraska accredited public schools and districts?”

The central question was supported by the following subquestions for the two accreditation models:

1. How important are the AdvancED Standards of Quality to school improvement activities in AdvancED schools?
2. How important is the Nebraska Frameworks Rubric to school improvement activities in Nebraska Frameworks schools?
3. What actions were most likely taken in response to external visits for both accreditation models?
4. What are the most important factors when choosing an accreditation model?
5. What are the major similarities and differences between administrator and teacher perception of school improvement activities?

## **Method**

In this descriptive quantitative study, an online survey of public school administrators and teachers was conducted to gather information about how strongly various factors played a role in their accreditation process. Respondents indicated whether they are an AdvancED or Frameworks school or district. They also indicated whether they were an administrator or a teacher. This allowed the researcher to determine the differences between the two groups. One set of questions was focused specifically toward why they have chosen their accreditation process while another set of questions allowed them to indicate their response to the external visit.

## **Assumptions**

Due to the fact that research is not always perfect, certain assumptions need to be made (Bryant, 2004). A fundamental assumption to this study was that teachers and administrators would take the time to respond to a survey and provide responses that to the best of their knowledge are true and complete. The data could be skewed if participants respond by stating what they think should happen or what they think should be the correct answer, as opposed to what is actually the case in their building or district. Anonymity and confidentiality were closely guarded to give participants comfort in knowing that truthful answers would not harm them or their school if those answers were not necessarily flattering. It was also assumed that accreditation will continue to be required in Nebraska public schools. Without that requirement, this study loses much of its relevance.

## **Limitations**

Stating limitations in the methodology allows the researcher to identify potential issues with the data (Bryant 2004). Using an online survey created a limitation on this study. Participants were free to choose whether or not they want to respond to the survey invitation. This nonresponse error can lead to mistaken conclusions. Nonresponse error can be reduced by sending out invitations prior to the survey, then sending follow-up messages after sending the survey (Dillman, 2009).

## **Delimitations of the Study**

One delimitation for this study is that only schools in the state of Nebraska are being examined. AdvancED is a world-wide organization and accreditation rules are

different from location to location. States vary in their accreditation requirements. In one group of states, accreditation is not required, therefore, AdvancED Accreditation is strictly voluntary. Some states, such as Nebraska, require state accreditation so AdvancED Accreditation is earned in addition to the state accreditation process. In a third group of states, schools are either required or strongly encouraged to earn accreditation with AdvancED being recognized as a way to fulfill all or some of those requirements (AdvancED, 2009). The requirements in different states change the impact of AdvancED accreditation on the schools in those states. The results of this study are, therefore, not generalizable to other states.

### **Significance of the Study**

Schools and districts across the state of Nebraska are faced with a decision as to whether they should choose Nebraska Frameworks accreditation or regional accreditation through AdvancED. Knowing what factors into the decision for other schools and districts can help educators reach their decision. The results of this study will also allow the Nebraska Department of Education and AdvancED Nebraska to see what is important to schools and districts in Nebraska. This will help both organizations better meet the needs of its member schools through improved professional development and dissemination of information.

### **Summary**

All Nebraska public districts and/or schools must maintain accreditation with the Nebraska Department of Education. Schools and districts can choose to maintain their accreditation through the Nebraska Frameworks for Accreditation or through

membership with the AdvancED Accreditation Agency. This descriptive quantitative study will seek to determine the most important factors in determining which accreditation method schools choose and why. An explanation of how the Nebraska Department of Education began using two accreditation methods will be discussed in the review of literature in Chapter 2 of this study. Chapter 3 will then provide a detailed description of the research methodology used in this study. The results gathered by the survey will be explained in Chapter 4. Finally, Chapter 5 will contain a discussion of those results including suggestions for further research.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Review of the Literature**

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this literature review was to explain the history of the involvement of the Nebraska Legislature and Department of Education in the rules governing the accreditation of public schools in Nebraska. In fact, the history of state involvement with public schools in Nebraska began before Nebraska even became a state. Among the first general acts of the Nebraska Territory Legislature in 1855 was the establishment of a free public school system (Olson & Naugle, 1997).

#### **Nebraska Approval and Accreditation**

The act that the legislature approved in 1855 (Olson & Naugle, 1997) stipulated that the librarian of the territory would also be the territorial superintendent of public education. It also established that county superintendents be elected to oversee the public school districts, to appropriate county funds for education and to issue certificates to those qualified to teach. It also allowed for election of local school boards who would not only be responsible for determining the location and the building of the school, hiring teachers, and buying supplies and books, but also for reporting to the county superintendent “the number of white persons of school age (5 to 21 years), number of schools and branches taught, pupils, teachers and their compensation, cost of buildings, amount and resources of funds expended and the number of volumes in the library” (Sheldon, 1920, p. 484).

The original law proved to be rather ineffective as no schools were established. It was repealed and replaced by an act approved in November of 1858, which established the township as the administrative unit for schools and provided for the creation of township high schools. This law was then completely overhauled by the first state legislature in 1867. The township system was abandoned and the post of county superintendent was re-established. Throughout the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the laws governing Nebraska schools were often revised and updated. Updates included granting the power to certify teachers to the state superintendent, creation of a free textbook law and a compulsory education law (Sheldon, 1920).

Adopted in 1875, the Nebraska Constitution included a section calling for the Legislature to provide for free instruction in common schools across the state (Miewald & Longo, 2009). The constitution made the Superintendent of Public Instruction a constitutional office (Jensen, 1968). The desire of early Nebraska teachers and officials was to provide a quality education across the state. For example, a newly established State Teachers Association recommended that, “every child shall be instructed in the rudiments of a common school education” (Jensen, 1968, p. 18). Early Nebraska school leaders developed policies, procedures and guidelines for schools to follow. While local districts resisted the department’s move to gain power and authority, they eventually accepted the role that the Department of Public Instruction needed to play (Limoges, 2001).

By the late 1800’s, the Department of Public Instruction published approval standards. While the Department approved schools, the University of Nebraska



accredited schools (Thomas, 1916). High schools that offered three or four years of schooling could apply for accreditation while schools that offered one or two years of schooling could only be approved schools (Thomas, 1916).

In the 1920's, State Superintendent, John M. Matzen began work to standardize schools. He committed a great deal of his time on the requirements for high school approval and the procedures to be followed for accreditation by the University of Nebraska. He created forms and procedures for reporting the requirements (Jensen, 1968). For example, he listed ten minimum requirements for standardization and published an official score card to determine how well schools met the requirements. Schools needed a score of 75 to be classified as a Standard School (Matzen, 1921).

Superintendent Matzen (1921) explained that the purpose of standards approving schools was so that a "more complete system of education may be developed" (Matzen, 1921, p. 4). He continued...

By this means also the work of these schools may be made to harmonize more fully with the courses in higher institutions of learning, thus affording the ambitious child an open door to a more efficient preparation for life. (Matzen, 1921, p. 4)

The Department of Public Instruction assumed complete control of approving and accrediting schools in 1949, when Superintendent Wayne O. Reed successfully lobbied the state legislature for that control. Criteria was carefully developed and adopted by the newly formed State Accreditation Committee (Jensen, 1968). Three levels of approval and accreditation criteria were established: approval standards, A accreditation standards and AA accreditation standards (Limoges, 2001). The purpose of approval and accreditation was to maintain adequate school programs and move schools toward

improvement, however, accreditation standards were more rigorous and schools had to not only meet the minimum standards of approval, but then also meet more demanding standards for accreditation (Limoges, 2001; Sullivan, 1963). In order to evaluate a school based on its philosophy and objectives and to evaluate how well it is meeting the needs of its students, the overall programming of the school would be evaluated and not just certain aspects of the school (Sullivan, 1963). Studies of the effectiveness of the different levels of approval and accreditation did show that the accreditation classification seemed to improve education in Nebraska and the school that earned the AA Accreditation rating consistently had higher academic achievement (Jantze, 1961; Sullivan, 1963).

In 1957, Nebraska became one of the first states to develop the process of “committee evaluation” (Jensen, 1968, p. 44). Under this process, schools would complete a self-evaluation, followed by a committee visit that reviewed the self-evaluation and developed recommendations for improvement (Jensen, 1968). This is a process that the state and AdvancED continue to use today.

The 1967 Rules and Regulations for the Accreditation of Public and Non-Public School Systems (Nebraska Department of Education, 1967) maintained that while accreditation was voluntary, it was increasingly important in the complex world of work and that it was an important tool for parents to know which schools have qualified staff and quality educational materials (Nebraska Department of Education, 1967). By the start of the 1967 – 68 school year, the state would only accredit school systems and the rules for accreditation did not necessarily apply to Class I (individual K-8) schools (Jensen, 1968).

Throughout the 1970's and 1980's, the Department of Education continued the process of approval and accreditation for public schools in Nebraska. That changed in the early 1990's, however. State law mandated that all public schools in the state of Nebraska were to be accredited by the 1992 – 1993 school year. (Nebraska Legislature, 2010). The law states that it is the “intent of the Legislature that all public school students shall have access to all educational services required of accredited schools” (Nebraska Legislature, 2010).

The Nebraska Legislature passed a law in 2000, requiring students to be assessed on content standards. Unlike other states, Nebraska did not use a single, high stakes test but instead created a system known as STARS: School-based Teacher-led Assessment and Reporting System (Roschewski, Isernhagen & Dappen, 2006). STARS assessments were locally developed assessments based on state or local standards used for state reporting. This was based on the idea that these assessments could have the biggest impact on teaching and learning (Isernhagen & Dappen, 2005). Then, in 2008, the Nebraska Legislature passed a bill calling for the development of a single statewide assessment of reading, math and science. These new assessments would be known as the Nebraska State Accountability (NeSA) assessment (Teahon, 2012).

Most recently, the legislature passed a bill known as the Quality Education and Accountability Act in 2014. This law led to the development of Nebraska's accountability system known as Accountability for a Quality Education System, Today and Tomorrow (AQuESTT). Under AQuESTT, Nebraska schools are classified, but that classification does not reflect accreditation. (Nebraska Department of Education, 2015).

### **North Central Association and AdvancED Accreditation**

In March of 1895, representatives from various North-Central States met at Northwestern University for the purpose of organizing an “association of colleges and secondary schools of the North-Central States” (Davis, 1945, p. 5). Representatives from Ohio, Michigan, Indiana, Illinois, Wisconsin, Iowa, and Missouri were present. Representatives from Kansas, Nebraska, and Minnesota were invited but did not attend. Resolutions and policy established during the first meeting set the purpose of the association: “closer relations among educational institutions, cooperative efforts directed toward the achievement of desirable educational reforms, and an approach to national unity with respect to the educational policies and procedures adopted” (Davis, 1945, p. 13).

By the early 1900’s, many colleges and universities were accrediting secondary schools by employing inspectors to visit the high schools and provide recommendations to meet admission requirements. The inspectors were not just visiting schools within their own state, however. Many secondary schools were visited by inspectors from multiple universities and were receiving different recommendations from each visit (Davis, 1945). The need to establish uniform policies was evident.

At the 1901 Association Meeting, a committee was established to begin the creation of uniform policies, but the committee realized that the work would require much greater analysis than they could give. Therefore, they created a more permanent body designed to establish more uniform policies that they desired. This body would become known as the Commission on Accredited Schools (Davis, 1945, p. 48). Four

committees within the Commission were formed, each with its own plan of action. The committees included an Executive Committee, a Committee on Unit Courses of Studies, a High School Inspection Committee and a Committee on College Credit for High School Work (Newman, 1996).

The first Commission report was presented at the 1902 annual meeting. The report was a collection of each committee's findings. The committee on unit courses recommended that a unit course in high school be defined as a course covering a school year of at least 35 weeks, high school graduation and college admissions requirements included at least 15 units and requirements for college admission included at least 3 units of English and 2 units of mathematics (Davis, 1945; Newman, 1996).

The Committee on High School Inspection immediately set up plans for the inspection and accreditation of high schools. This committee recommended that a Board of Inspectors be appointed to conduct the work and all the necessary forms be provided to acquire the necessary data regarding the standards that the committee proposed (Davis, 1945). The committee recommended four standards to be used in evaluating the school. The first standard recommended that the "minimum scholastic attainment of all high school teachers be the equivalent of graduation from a college belonging to the North Central Association and their education should include "special training in the subjects they teach" (Newman, 1996, p. 68). The second standard proposed that any one teacher should not be teaching more than five (5) 45-minute class periods a day. The third standard indicated that laboratory and library facilities be "adequate to the needs of instruction in the subjects taught as outlined in the report of the Commission" (Davis,

1945, p. 51). The fourth standard dealt with what we could call today the culture and climate of a school.

That while the foregoing are exceedingly important factors affecting the quality of the work, the *esprit de corps*, the efficiency of the instruction, the acquired habits of thought and study, and the general intellectual and ethical tone of the school are of paramount importance, and therefore only schools which rank well in these particulars, as evidenced by rigid, thorough-going, sympathetic inspection, should be considered eligible to the list. (Davis, 1945, p. 51)

The initial report by the Commission was accepted and a Board of Inspectors was appointed (Davis, 1945). Instead of setting up an independent team of inspectors to visit high schools, the Board used state agencies to carry out the task of inspection. The first list of accredited schools was then published in 1904. It should be noted that the first list included three schools from Nebraska, Beatrice, Lincoln Academy in Kearney, and Omaha Central High School (Davis, 1945, p. 244). Accrediting schools had an impact on the basic policies of the Association in that it changed from being a small group of secondary and post-secondary institutions to a large organization. By 1917, 598 institutions had joined the NCA (Newman, 1996, p. 91). The increase in size also meant an increase in influence across the region. The power and status of the Association was enhanced by the number of schools that worked to meet its standards. The North Central Association was “transformed from an exclusive club to a select but open association” (Newman, 1996, p. 91).

In addition to establishing uniform policies, the early Association was equally concerned with educational and organizational change. Early organizer, A. F. Nightingale, noted that, “What we consider radical ideas today will be conservative tomorrow, and what is conservative today the wildest schemer did not dream of a decade

ago” (Newman, 1996, p. 52). This statement illustrated the idea that education is continually changing and that a philosophy stressing process guided the association’s development over the years. The philosophy of change and growth allowed the association to continue to be influential through the turbulent time between World War I and World War II. By this time, the association was not only interested in accreditation, but it was also a leading agency of reform (Newman, 1996).

One of the major criticisms of secondary education in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century was that it was not meeting the needs of all students because of the emphasis on college preparation while only one in four students graduated from high school in 1920 (Newman, 1996). Reformers began to call for a secondary education for all youth. In fact, public high school enrollment shot up from about 915,000 students in 1910 to about 2.2 million in 1920 (Educational Policies Commission, 1955, p. 46). The reform that the Association led, however, was not to develop a new curriculum for schools, but instead identify what schools needed to do to reform their own curricula. This was one of the first efforts of the Association specifically designed to “help schools learn how to change themselves” (Newman, 1996, p. 112). This philosophy of self-appraisal and local improvement efforts changed the view of the Association from being a policing agency that puts pressure on institutions to conform to a voluntary organization that helps schools work at the local level to expand and improve. It was in 1962 that a Committee on Accreditation Procedures of the Commission of Secondary Schools was formed at their annual conference to discuss the feasibility of “the possibilities of some type of periodic self-evaluation and visitation to supplement our current procedures” (Newman,

1996, p. 241). The process that schools be evaluated once every seven years using materials approved by the Commission was established in the mid 1960's. It was recognized that this procedure would require the voluntary assistance of school faculty members to serve as evaluators in other schools. Donald Manlove, committee chair, explained that this self-evaluation and visitation plan stressed the local, democratic approach to change. "It is a principle of democracy that those affected by judgments or decisions should understand and participate in making them" (Newman, 1996, p. 244).

To assist member schools and the volunteers, a 14 page "Evaluation Guide for Secondary Schools" was published in the spring 1965 edition of *North Central Association Quarterly* (Newman, 1996, p. 245). This guide outlined the steps to be followed in the new evaluation process and emphasized school improvement (Newman, 1996). The guides have changed through the years, but the process of self-evaluation and using volunteers from other schools as evaluators continues today.

While the North Central Association continued to change and grow through the years, including adding Department of Defense Schools that began to spring up around the globe after World War II, the next major shift in accreditation came in conjunction with the publication of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983 (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). Written by the newly created National Commission on Excellence in Education, *A Nation at Risk* was written to provide practical recommendations for educational improvement. The first of its recommendations centered on content, which became a major emphasis on reform efforts. From this emphasis on content came a focus on outcome-based education. The North Central Association then began offering



Outcome Accreditation. While the standards needed to be adjusted, the existing self-study and team visit process was able to remain. However, the examination of the school's products related to the outcomes, the workload and time commitment greatly increased (Newman, 1996).

In the late 1980's, business leaders were not satisfied with the pace of reforms and were in favor of a more complete approach to reform. They suggested having a

regime of standards expressing expectations of what students should know and be able to do; assessments capable of gauging students' progress toward the standards; and measures rewarding or sanctioning schools based on their record of raising student achievement (Rhodes, 2012, p. 76).

Schools were slow to adopt these ideas so the business leaders committed to lobbying state and local governments for ten years to get these reforms implemented. In 1989, the National Governors Association developed a series of goals advancing this standards-based approach. While the goals didn't immediately work their way into federal legislation, they did have a strong influence on future education policymaking (Rhodes, 2012). The first two federal laws were enacted in 1994 and were known as the Goals 2000: Educate America Act and the Improving America's Schools Act. These two acts supported the creation of challenging state standards, assessment and accountability systems and intensive professional development aligned with the standards (Anderson & Welsh, 2000). It was up to the states to implement these reforms, which lead to significant differences across the nation (Rhodes, 2012).

The next major leap forward in federal education law was the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) which was passed in 2002. This law imposed detailed regulations on testing and accountability. These mandates included testing students in grades 3-8 each

year in Math, reading and science and required schools to make “adequate yearly progress” toward making all students proficient by 2014 (Rhodes, 2012, p. 126). While NCLB did produce early gains, student achievement hit a plateau before the law’s ten-year anniversary (Schneider, 2011). Consensus was that this law was unworkable and broken (Rhodes, 2012; Burke 2012). However, Congress failed to rewrite NCLB and the Obama Administration forced additional reforms through competitive Race to the Top grants (Rhodes, 2012).

The passage of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in 2015 saw a reversal of federal involvement. The law still requires testing, but gives the power back to the states to produce an accountability system. In his paper on the development of state accountability systems, Dr. Mark Elgart, CEO of AdvancED, writes that,

An accountability system based on continuous improvement changes reporting from a compliance activity to a **process** that enables positive change at a local level. It is important for all districts and schools to receive comprehensive feedback and learn what they do well or poorly (Elgart, 2016, p. 7).

The North Central Association was not the only accrediting or school improvement agency in the United States. The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Council on Accreditation and School Improvement was formed in 1895 for the improvement of schools in the southern states (AdvancED, 2009, p. 3; Bruner & Brantly, 2004). The National Study of School Evaluation was formed in 1933 and developed materials that assisted schools in evaluating and planning school improvement activities (Ridout & Manlove, 1987). These organizations unified in 2006 to create AdvancED, the largest community of education professionals in the world (AdvancED, 2016).

### **Review of Other Studies on Accreditation**

This dissertation on accreditation in Nebraska public schools did not replicate any previous research, however, other studies on accreditation both across the United States and in Nebraska schools did precede this one. They provided various levels of research that aided this study.

In a study on teacher attitudes and accreditation outcome scores, a causal-comparative study was conducted to determine whether teacher attitudes regarding accreditation in AdvancED schools and professional development affected their school's accreditation outcome scores. The hypothesis that accreditation scores would be higher for schools in which teachers had positive attitudes about the accreditation process turned out to be correct. Scores were significantly higher for those schools (Ulmer, 2005). This is significant to this student as it alludes to the limitation that participants are expected to respond honestly to the best of their knowledge. If a participant has a positive attitude about their process, their answers may reflect that attitude even though their answers may not fully correspond with actual practice in the school.

The State of Alabama began requiring schools to get accredited through an outside agency around 1996 (Mullen, 2001). A case study was conducted with two teachers at a school in Alabama that was going through the accreditation process with the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) for the first time. This study found four themes emerging from this school's experience: forced self-study, research instrument, designing standards, and control of outcomes (Mullen, 2001).

Teachers identified positive and negative aspects of a forced self-study. They saw the benefits of reflection and articulation of what they do in their school. They were able to create school-wide action plans that enhanced the performance of their school. This is backed up by a California study that showed that self-study had a positive impact on school improvement efforts (Rosa, 2013). However, they were overwhelmed with the process and the paperwork that was involved. Teachers were required to organize materials a specific way, resulting in what they felt was “busy work” that took time away that could have been used to better prepare for the visit (Mullen, 2001, p. 108).

An example of a research instrument for the second theme was that the school was required to use, at an extra cost, surveys created by SACS. This school had a partnership with a university for professional development that could have allowed it to produce an effective survey at no cost to the school (Mullen, 2001).

A similar sentiment was found in the third theme. While the teachers expressed pleasure in the process of building their school improvement plan, they were dismayed by the requirements to write action plans using a specific format with specific vocabulary. Finally, the fourth theme, control of the outcomes for school accreditation, showed that while many stakeholder groups were interviewed about strengths and weaknesses and what they would like to see changed, it was obvious that the SACS team was in the “driver’s seat” (Mullen, 2001, p. 114).

The factors that influence why schools would seek accreditation with SACS is of interest to this study. The research in the Alabama Case Study corresponds to some of factors that influence accreditation in this study. The compulsory reality of accreditation

is similar to the 1992 requirement that all public schools in Nebraska be accredited (Nebraska Department of Education, 2012b). The fact that the school didn't have much choice in the tools it had to use is similar to the fact that certain tools and rubrics are required by AdvancED today.

A study in Mississippi and a study in Pennsylvania both centered on Superintendent perceptions. Both studied the criteria that go into accrediting schools and found that superintendents agreed that state testing should only be one factor among multiple criteria. The studies also found that superintendents thought that accreditation standards in their respective states influenced curriculum and instruction in their schools but also contributed to increase stress among teachers (Merhundrew, 2010; Mulligan 2002).

These findings correspond with a study from east Alabama that studied teacher and principal perceptions of the accreditation process. This study found that the accreditation process had a positive effect on school change and student success. They also found that even though the participants felt it was a worthwhile process, they indicated that they often did not have adequate resources for working on accreditation (Wood, 1999).

In his *History of Nebraska Public School Accreditation* (2001), Dr. Barry Limoges wrote a detailed study of the history of public schools and how accreditation developed in Nebraska. It provided a useful historical perspective of accreditation that helped generate the context of this study. It did not, however, go into the factors of

accreditation that influence activities in school and districts. His study also does not analyze reasons for schools choosing one accreditation process over the other.

Dr. Michael Sieh (2009) also conducted a study on accreditation in Nebraska schools titled *Examining the Relationship Between Nebraska Superintendents Perception of Their Involvement with School Improvement and Factors that May Affect Their Involvement*, his study focused on how involved superintendents were in the phases of the Nebraska Model for school improvement. In his study, he provided an explanation of the two accreditation processes, but only to present the context of what accreditation looked like in Nebraska. This study did not go into the factors that influence accreditation activities, nor does it examine factors that go into the choice of models.

An historical perspective of accreditation came from Nels Sullivan (1963) titled *The Effectiveness of the AA Accreditation to Provide Better Education in the Communities of Nebraska*. As mentioned in the history of accreditation, Nebraska had three levels of approval and accreditation. At the lowest level, a school could be approved. Then came the A Accreditation for many schools. Finally, a few schools got to the AA Accredited level. This study was able to demonstrate the effectiveness of the AA Accreditation level, but it did not focus upon North Central Association (AdvancED) Accreditation.

One study in Iowa did have some similarities to this one. In her study, *An Examination of the Perception of the Importance and Effectiveness of Delivery of the North Central Association Program Functions to Iowa Schools*, Joyce Judas (1994) found the mean levels of importance of certain North Central Association functions. One

of the functions, *Recognition for High Standards* scored between somewhat and very important (3.58) on a five-point Likert scale (p. 112). This function is similar to two of the important factors in choosing an accreditation method in this study: high status of the process and rigor of the process.

In summary, these studies provided background information and historical context for this current study. Even though they looked at accreditation through a different lense, they helped focus the purpose of this study on an examination of the important factors that influence accreditation activities in Nebraska public schools.

### **Summary**

The desire to provide quality education in Nebraska began when Nebraska was still a territory. By the late 1800's, the Department of Public Instruction began publishing standards for approving schools and the University of Nebraska began accrediting schools. At the same time, the North Central Association began accrediting schools across a ten-state region with the goal of standardizing the preparation of students to enter universities in that region. The standards, rules, regulations and procedures have changed throughout the years, but the desire to ensure a quality education for all students has remained constant. The move to requiring accreditation for all public schools in the early 1990's set up today's system of choices between the Nebraska Frameworks Model and the AdvancED Accreditation system.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Methodology**

#### **Introduction**

This study seeks to examine the critical factors of accreditation that influence Nebraska AdvancED and Nebraska Frameworks Accredited public schools and districts and to identify what factors play the strongest roles in determining which accreditation method school districts choose. A descriptive quantitative study will be completed through distributing a survey to public school administrators and teachers throughout the state of Nebraska.

#### **Research Questions**

The overall question that this study posed was: “What are the most important factors that influence accreditation in Nebraska accredited public schools and districts?”

The following sub questions supported the central question:

1. How important are the AdvancED Standards of Quality to school improvement activities in AdvancED schools?
2. How important is the Nebraska Frameworks Rubric to school improvement activities in Nebraska Frameworks schools?
3. What actions were most likely taken in response to external visits for both accreditation models?
4. What are the most important factors when choosing an accreditation model?
5. What are the major similarities and differences between administrator and teacher perception of accreditation activities?



The purpose of these sub questions was to clarify what role the formats of the two accreditation models play in how school and district officials determine which accreditation model they choose and how important the model is when it comes to the actual implementation of the accreditation process. The final sub question examined the similarities and differences between the perceptions of administrators and teachers in regard to the actions that schools and districts take in order to maintain the status of accreditation.

### **Research Design**

This study is using a descriptive research design. The purpose of this descriptive research is to add to the body of knowledge concerning accreditation in Nebraska by identifying the most important factors that influence accreditation activities. This study is using a cross-sectional survey design in that data was collected at one point in time (Creswell, 2015, p. 380).

Data was collected using a web-based questionnaire through Qualtrics titled “Factors that Influence Accreditation” that was developed by the researcher (Appendix B). A web-based questionnaire is useful in this case because it will allow respondents to answer at their convenience and as Dillman, Smyth, and Christian (2009) explain, web-based questionnaires work well when surveying a specific group that has high rates of internet access such as staff members at public schools.

### **Population**

The population for this study included administrators and teachers at all public schools and districts in the state of Nebraska. This population excludes the researcher

and certified staff in one district in Nebraska that was asked to review the questionnaire in order to ensure its readability and viability before sending it out to the participants. The population is determined by a list of accredited schools that is maintained by the accreditation office at the Nebraska Department of Education (Appendix C).

### **Sampling Procedure**

An examination of the list of AdvancED and Nebraska Frameworks districts demonstrated a disproportionate number of larger schools that are AdvancED accredited while a majority of smaller schools are Nebraska Frameworks accredited. Therefore, in order to ensure that the same number of similar sized AdvancED accredited districts and Nebraska Frameworks accredited districts were asked to participate, a stratified random sampling procedure was used. Stratified sampling is used when there is an imbalance in the important characteristics of the population as is seen in this case (Creswell 2015).

School districts were grouped by number of students according to the Nebraska Department of Education School Finance and Organization Services 2015-16 TEEOSA Formula Students List. The Formula students were the numbers of students in a district that count toward state aid. According to this list, there were 245 public school districts in the state of Nebraska. At first, districts were split into four equal-sized groups with about 61 districts in each group. However, there were very few AdvancED districts in the very small group. Therefore, 3 groups of school districts were created, small districts, medium districts, and large districts.

Small districts were districts that had 351 or fewer formula students. There were 128 total small districts. Medium districts were districts that had between 365 and 659

students, which created a group of 62 districts. Finally, 56 districts with more than 685 students were identified as large districts.

The districts were then matched according to their accreditation affiliation and number of students so that an equal number of Frameworks Accredited districts and AdvancED Accredited districts with an equal number of students could be randomly chosen for the survey. Fifteen (15) Frameworks and 15 AdvancED Accredited districts from the small schools category were invited to participate, while 10 medium-sized districts and 7 large districts from each accreditation affiliation were invited to participate.

### **Validity**

The goal of this research was to clearly understand the factors that influence the choice of accreditation methods in public schools and districts within the state of Nebraska. It was therefore important to ensure that the survey method was clear for participants.

In order to ensure that the survey was clear, the researcher employed a Pilot Test of the questionnaire and cover letter. In a pilot test, the questionnaire is given to a small number of individuals to complete and evaluate. The researcher can then make changes based on feedback from this pilot group (Creswell, 2015). Conducting a pilot test was useful because it helped to reduce or eliminate potential misunderstandings or bias within the items and helped ensure that the cover letter was clear and helped persuade participants to complete the questionnaire (Thomas, 2004).

To complete the pilot test, the researcher sent the cover letter and questionnaire to administrators and teachers to one Nebraska public school district. In addition to the items in the questionnaire, these respondents were also asked to identify any items that were difficult to answer due to confusion or lack of understanding. No major changes were made based on these responses. Another evaluation question asked respondents the amount of time it took them to complete the questionnaire in order to provide as accurate an estimation of time as possible within the cover letter. Respondents were also asked to evaluate the cover letter in order to provide feedback to the researcher. Again, no adjustments were made based on this feedback.

### **Method**

Various methods were employed to reduce nonresponse error. This type of error occurs when the population that chooses not to respond are different from the population that does respond. Nonresponse error can be minimized by ensuring more respondents are motivated to respond (Dillman et al., 2009). Prior to sending out the questionnaire via email, the researcher sent a letter to the superintendent of each district asking their permission to survey the staff in the district. Out of the 64 districts, 27 responded affirmatively.

Once permission to survey the staff was received, an email was sent to the certified staff in the district. Staff email was found by downloading lists of staff members from the Nebraska Department of Education's Education Directory Search webpage. An email was sent to staff inviting them to participate. The email included a link to the Qualtrics survey. The first page of the survey included a message of informed

consent so that participants needed to agree to continue into the survey. Follow-up emails were sent one and two weeks after the initial message. In a web-based survey, a majority of responses come within the first week. A reminder email after the first week will lead to a jump in the total number of responses (Thomas, 2004). The web-based survey was open for a total of four weeks in order to have the highest possible response rates in a timely fashion.

### **Data Analysis**

The data was collected using a web-based survey (Appendix B) The respondents indicated whether their school was Nebraska Frameworks accredited or AdvancED accredited. Scores from the survey were used to describe the accreditation process across each type of school and they will be used to compare the two populations. Comparing the mean scores of each population is known as an independent-measures design (Gravetter & Wallnau, 2009).

The first set of questions were used to determine which factors have the greatest effect on each school's improvement process. Each item was scored from one (1) to five (5) with one equaling not at all an influence and five equaling greatly influencing the school improvement process. Mean and mode were calculated in order to determine which of the items had the greatest influence on school improvement activities. The scores could then be compared between Nebraska Frameworks schools and AdvancED schools.

In the second set of questions, participants were asked to answer questions regarding how often they work on specific school improvement activities. These

questions speak to the level of importance the activities play in the school improvement process. The idea is that if the schools are not using the items, then the items are not important to the school improvement process. The answers were calculated by assigning scores of one point for throughout the school year, two points for once during a school year, three points for every couple years, four points for once every five-year cycle and five points for answering don't know. The mean scores were compared between the Nebraska Frameworks and AdvancED schools in order to determine if there was a difference between the level of importance each item plays between the different accreditation methods.

Participants were asked to rate the level of importance of certain factors in choosing their particular accreditation method in the third section of the questionnaire. Participants chose a number on a scale from one (1) to five (5). Choosing one indicated that the item was not at all important while choosing five indicated that the item was extremely important. There were also two open-ended questions (Appendix B). The use of open-ended questions allowed a wider range of answers because participants were not limited to the preset items (Thomas, 2004). This section allowed the researcher to determine which items have the greatest effect on the choice of accreditation methods.

In the final section, participants marked any actions they took in response to their last external visit. This section allowed the researcher to identify which actions occurred more often after an external visit and then compare actions between the two accreditation methods. This information helped indicate if either accreditation method produces greater response than the other.

**Ethical Consideration**

It is important that data collection be ethical and respect the individual participants and the schools that they represent (Creswell, 2015). In order to be ethical and respectful, the researcher obtained informed consent from the participants. Within the cover letter, participants were notified of certain rights and guarantees and that by completing the survey, their consent was implied (Creswell, 2015). For example, participants were made aware that their individual data would be treated confidentially and would not be shared with any individuals outside of the project.

**Summary**

The purpose of this study was to determine the most important factors that influence accreditation in Nebraska public schools and districts. The data gathered through the “Factors That Influence Accreditation” instrument allowed the researcher to describe the items that have the greatest influence on accreditation procedures, the level of importance that schools place on each accreditation method’s standards, and what actions were most likely taken in response to external visits for both accreditation models.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Results**

#### **Introduction**

Chapter 4 contains the results of the survey instrument that was administered to staff at various public school districts in Nebraska. Descriptive statistics such as mean scores and standard deviation were used to describe the current factors in the choice of accreditation and school improvement activities. The results corresponding to each research question are presented in tables with a brief narrative of each set of results.

#### **Research Questions**

The goal of this study was to determine the critical factors of accreditation that influence Nebraska AdvancED and Nebraska Frameworks Accredited public schools and districts. The overall research question used to meet that goal was: “What are the most important factors that influence accreditation in Nebraska accredited public schools and districts?” The following sub questions supported the central question:

1. How important are the AdvancED Standards of Quality to school improvement activities in AdvancED schools?
2. How important is the Nebraska Frameworks Rubric to school improvement activities in Nebraska Frameworks schools?
3. What actions were most likely taken in response to external visits for both accreditation models?
4. What are the most important factors when choosing an accreditation model?



5. What are the major similarities and differences between administrator and teacher perception of accreditation activities?

### **Participants**

The population of this study included certified staff in Nebraska public schools. Because larger school districts would have more staff, stratified sampling was used to ensure that different sized school districts were chosen to receive the survey and ensure that a disproportionate number of responses would not come from larger school districts. Districts were placed in three groups based on the number of students according to the 2015 – 2016 TEEOSA Formula Students list. For the purpose of this study, districts with fewer than 351 students were considered small districts while districts with a population between 365 and 659 students were considered medium districts. Any district that had more than 685 students was considered a large district. Using these numbers, 128 districts were identified as small districts, 62 were identified as medium districts, and 56 were identified as large districts. Nebraska Frameworks accredited districts were then matched to similar sized AdvancEd accredited districts and then randomly chosen so that similar sized school districts would be chosen. Fifteen (15) Frameworks and 15 AdvancED Accredited districts from the small schools category were invited to participate, while 10 medium-sized districts and 7 large districts from each accreditation affiliation were invited to participate.

A letter was then sent to the superintendent of each randomly selected district to ask permission to survey the staff. Out of the 32 AdvancED accredited districts, 16 gave permission to survey the staff while 11 superintendents in Nebraska Frameworks

accredited districts gave permission for their staff to be surveyed. Email addresses of all certified staff members in each district that responded were downloaded from the education directory available on the Nebraska Department of Education website. A total of 1,714 email invitations were sent to the certified staff members of participating districts. Follow-up reminders were sent one and two weeks after the initial email in order to increase participation rates. There were 395 completed responses, however, 12 of those respondents did not agree to the consent form leaving a total of 383 usable responses. This response rate of 22% is low, however, in their meta-analysis of mail and email response rates, Shih and Fan (2009), noted that response rates for email surveys are generally lower than response rates of mailed surveys with an average response rate of 33% and a standard deviation of 22%. The response rate of this study is within that standard deviation. The percentage of responses varied according to accreditation method with 26% of staff members in AdvancED accredited districts responding and 14% of staff members in Nebraska Frameworks accredited districts responding.

### **Results of the Data Analysis**

In order to determine what factors were most influential, participants were asked to rate how important a list of items were to their accreditation and school improvement activities. They were to rate these items on a scale from one (1) to five (5) with one meaning not at all important, two indicating slightly important, three was moderately important, a score of four was very important, and a five meant extremely important. Each item's mean score was computed. The higher the mean score, the greater the level of importance that participants placed on that item. The purpose of this list of items was

to determine and describe the relative importance of the AdvancED standards to the schools that are AdvancED accredited and the Nebraska Frameworks to schools that are Nebraska Frameworks accredited. Table 1 shows the items in order of importance for participants that indicated they were in AdvancED schools.

Table 1

*Factors that Influence School Improvement Process—AdvancED Schools*

Item	Number of Responses	Mean Score	Standard Deviation
District Strategic Plans or Initiatives	264	3.95	.773
NeSA Assessment Scores	265	3.90	.964
AdvancED Standards of Quality	263	3.83	.847
Administrator Perceptions	265	3.79	.862
Teacher Perceptions	265	3.71	.867
Norm-Referenced Tests	264	3.57	.904
Stakeholder Feedback	265	3.50	.871
Current Trends in Education	265	3.43	.818
Nebraska Frameworks Rubric	247	3.00	1.128
Other Factors Not Listed	236	2.94	.934

These scores indicated that the item with the most influence on the accreditation and school improvement process in AdvancED schools is district strategic plans followed by scores on the Nebraska State Accountability (NeSA) Assessment. The AdvancED Standards of Quality had the third highest score at 3.83. A standard deviation of .847 means that 68% of the responses were between 2.983 and 4.677, which indicated that the majority consider the AdvancED Standards to be at least moderately important.

Scores for staff members that indicated that they were in Nebraska Frameworks accredited schools are listed in Table 2. The top three responses were District Strategic Plans or Initiatives, NeSA Assessment Scores and Teacher Perception. The Nebraska Frameworks Rubric was rated as the fourth most influential item on this list. A majority of participants labeled this item as moderately important, very important or extremely important, however, most of those responses were in the moderately important range whereas the majority of responses in the District Strategic Plan, NeSA Assessment and teacher perception items were in the very important to extremely important range.

Table 2

*Factors that Influence School Improvement Process—Nebraska Frameworks Schools*

Item	Number of Responses	Mean Score	Standard Deviation
District Strategic Plans or Initiatives	82	3.95	.718
NeSA Assessment Scores	82	3.95	.980
Teacher Perceptions	82	3.89	.956
Nebraska Frameworks Rubric	82	3.78	.875
Administrator Perceptions	82	3.66	.820
Norm-Referenced Tests	82	3.57	.917
Stakeholder Feedback	82	3.43	1.007
Current Trends in Education	82	3.37	.854
Other Factors Not Listed	82	3.00	1.025
AdvancED Standards of Quality	76	2.53	1.216

These scores indicated that the accreditation process was not the most important factor affecting the school improvement process in schools, regardless of accreditation method. District strategic plans or initiatives played a greater role in influencing the school improvement process in both AdvancED and Nebraska Frameworks Schools.

Since there was a difference in the importance that the AdvancED Standards and the Nebraska Frameworks Rubric played to their respective schools, an independent measures t-test was run to determine whether or not the difference was significant. The null hypothesis was that there is not a significant difference between AdvancED and Nebraska Frameworks schools. A 95% confidence interval was chosen to ensure a high level of confidence without creating too high a difficulty to reject the null hypothesis (Creswell, 2015). The statistical analysis yielded the result,  $t(343) = 0.4631, p > .05$ , which showed that there was not a significant difference between the two groups and therefore the null hypothesis was not rejected.

In order to determine how important the AdvancED Standards of Quality and Nebraska Frameworks are to their school improvement and strategic planning initiatives, participants were also asked how their schools reflected on the standards or rubrics and how important they were to the strategic planning process. Amongst all responses, 57% of the participants indicated that they reflect on the standards or rubric throughout the school year. For AdvancED schools, the percentage was slightly higher at 61%. Meanwhile, 55% of participants at Nebraska Frameworks schools indicated that the rubric is reflected upon throughout the school year. In regard to the strategic planning process, participants rated the AdvancED Standards or Nebraska Frameworks Rubric as

being (1) not at all important, (2) slightly important, (3) moderately important, (4) very important, or (5) extremely important. Together, 64% of participants indicated that the standards or rubrics were either very or extremely important to their strategic planning process. For AdvancED schools, the mean score was 3.79 with a standard deviation of .818. The mean score from participants at Nebraska Frameworks schools was 3.43 with a standard deviation of 1.08. Participants at AdvancED accredited schools indicated that the standards play a greater level of importance to their process than the rubric plays at Frameworks schools.

Nebraska Frameworks and AdvancED schools were quite similar in response to the question regarding what actions were taken in response to their accreditation visit. Table 3 indicates the percentage of participants that selected the possible responses based on their accreditation method. Participants were able to select all the possible choices that applied to them. Table 3 illustrates the point that there were very few differences in response to the external visit. The biggest difference was that 51% of participants from AdvancED schools indicated that they used data differently as a result of the accreditation visit while 39% of participants from Nebraska Frameworks schools so indicated. The second biggest difference was that 41% of participants from Nebraska Frameworks schools shared that they purchased new programs as a result of the accreditation visit and 33% of participants from AdvancED schools indicated that they purchased new programs. The majority of participants from both accreditation methods shared that they met to discuss the visit, engaged in professional development and created a formal action plan in response to their visit.

Table 3

*Response to External Visits*

Which Accreditation Method does your school or district use?		
Responses	AdvancED	Nebraska Frameworks
Had a meeting to discuss the visit	85%	85%
Engaged in professional development	82%	80%
Created a formal action plan	70%	72%
Increased technology usage	56%	54%
Made changes to the curriculum	52%	52%
Used data differently	51%	39%
Developed a new strategic plan	45%	46%
Developed new policy	39%	33%
Purchased new programs	33%	41%
Brought in an outside consultant	33%	27%
Wrote an accreditation progress report	32%	23%
Made staffing changes	14%	16%
others	5%	5%

It should be noted that only approximately one-third of AdvancED participants indicated that their school or district wrote an accreditation progress report as a response to their visit. This report is a required action within two years of the visit.

Participants were also asked to rate the level of importance certain factors play in why schools have chosen their accreditation model. A Likert scale of one (1) to five (5) was used with one meaning not at all important and five meaning extremely important. The mean score, standard deviation and number of responses for participants from AdvancED schools is shown in Table 4 while the same responses for participants from

Nebraska Frameworks schools are displayed in Table 5. Within both accreditation methods, compliance of state regulations stands out from the other factors with a high mean of 4.21 from participants from Nebraska Frameworks schools and a high mean of 4.27 from participants from AdvancED Schools. In fact, out of the 252 responses from AdvancED Schools not one single participant rated compliance to state regulations as 1 not at all important. They both also had relatively low standard deviations which would indicate that the majority of respondents would have put this at being at least moderately important.

Table 4

*Important Factors in Choosing Accreditation Method—AdvancED Schools*

Item	Number of Responses	Mean Score	Standard Deviation
Compliance of state regulations	252	4.27	.772
Available tools and resources	251	3.82	.824
Research Basis of the process	250	3.81	.884
Strength of the process	248	3.66	.831
High Status of the process	250	3.66	.922
Rigor of the process	250	3.50	.861
Cost	248	3.38	.923
Tradition	250	2.63	1.076



Table 5

*Important Factors in Choosing Accreditation Method—Nebraska Frameworks Schools*

Item	Number of Responses	Mean Score	Standard Deviation
Compliance of state regulations	80	4.21	.837
Available tools and resources	80	3.70	.818
Strength of the process	80	3.56	.824
Research Basis of the process	80	3.53	.886
Rigor of the process	80	3.33	.883
Cost	80	3.33	1.100
High Status of the process	80	3.15	1.020
Tradition	80	2.71	.957

On the opposite end, the lowest score for both accreditation methods was tradition. The mean score for tradition being a main factor in choosing accreditation methods for participants from AdvancED schools was 2.71. The mean score for participants from Nebraska Frameworks schools was 2.63. This indicated that tradition is seen as a little more than moderately important.

The final research question determined if there were major similarities and differences between administrator and teacher perception of accreditation activities. Table 6 displays the mean scores of the factors that influence accreditation for teachers, mean scores for principals and the differences of those scores. As mentioned before, these scores are based on a scale from one (1) to five (5) with one meaning not at all important, two indicating slightly important, three was moderately important, a score of four was very important, and a five meant extremely important.

Table 6

*Differences between Teacher and Principal Perceptions on Factors that Influence School Improvement*

Item	Teachers (n = 341)	Principals (n = 36)	Difference
NeSA Assessment Scores	3.90	4.03	.13
Norm-Referenced Tests	3.50	4.00	.50
Administrator Perceptions	3.78	3.85	.07
Teacher Perceptions	3.71	4.10	.39
Stakeholder Feedback	3.43	3.80	.37
AdvancED Standards of Quality	3.56	3.27	.29
Nebraska Frameworks rubric	3.19	3.49	.30
Current Trends in Education	3.41	3.55	.14
District Strategic Plans or Initiatives	3.90	4.42	.32
Other factors not listed	2.93	3.06	.13

The largest difference in mean scores was in the use of district strategic plans or initiatives as a factor that influences school improvement. Principals rated it as very high yielding a mean score of 4.42. The standard deviation was 0.54 meaning that the vast majority of participants rated district strategic plans or initiatives high. In fact, all but one principal rated it very important or extremely important. While the mean for teachers was a high 3.90 with a standard deviation of 0.78, about 24% of teachers rated it moderately to not at all important. The next biggest difference was in norm-referenced tests. Teachers and principals virtually agreed with the level of importance that the Nebraska State Accountability Assessment (NeSA) play in school improvement

activities, but principals rated norm-referenced tests higher than teachers with a mean score that placed it as very important (4.00).

In order to determine if these were significant differences, an independent measures t-test was run. The null hypothesis in this case was that there was no difference in the perceptions of teachers and principals. An alpha level of .05 was chosen to give a high level of confidence without creating too high a difficulty to reject the null hypothesis (Creswell, 2015). Statistical analysis of the difference between principals and teacher perceptions of the importance of district strategic plans or initiatives in the school improvement process did indicate that there was a significant difference,  $t(375) = 3.9002$ ,  $p < .05$ . The analysis of the difference in scores for the importance of norm-referenced tests was also statistically significant,  $t(375) = 3.2106$ ,  $p < .05$ . Interestingly, with a mean score difference of only .07, there was no statistically significant difference between principal and teacher ratings regarding the importance of administrator perceptions of the school improvement process. However, principals' mean rating of the importance of teacher perceptions at 4.10 was statistically significantly higher than the mean teacher rating of 3.71,  $t(375) = 2.4272$ ,  $p < .05$ .

Since there was a significant difference between principals and teachers regarding the importance that district strategic plans or initiatives play in the school improvement process, it was important to determine if there was a significant difference between the two groups in the level of importance of the AdvancED Accreditation Standards or the Nebraska Frameworks Rubric to the strategic planning process in the district. The principals' mean score for the importance of the Standards or the Rubric was 3.82 with a

standard deviation of 0.93 while the teachers' mean score was 3.66 with a standard deviation of 0.90. However, statistical analysis found that there was not a significant difference between the two groups,  $t(366) = 1.0461$ ,  $p > .05$ .

Examining the factors that influenced the choice of accreditation processes showed that principals and teachers had quite similar perceptions in most of the listed factors. Only two, tradition and cost showed a significant difference. Even though there was a significant difference for tradition as a reason for choosing an accreditation process,  $t(365) = 2.6258$ ,  $p < .05$ , this factor was only seen as moderately important to both groups with a mean score of 2.56 and a standard deviation of 1.03 for teachers and a mean score of 3.02 with a standard deviation of 1.17 for principals. The cost of the process also had a significant difference between teachers and principals,  $t(365) = 2.6680$ ,  $p < .05$ , with teachers mean score at 0.43 points higher than the principals. However, as was the case with tradition, the mean scores indicated that costs were only moderately important when it came to choosing an accreditation process. Table 7 illustrates the difference between all the factors used in this study.

Two open-ended questions were also asked. As previously stated, the use of open-ended questions allowed a wider range of answers because participants were not limited to the preset items (Thomas, 2004). The first question asked the participants to share what they saw as the strengths of their accreditation method while the second question asked about the perceived weaknesses of their accreditation method. The responses were categorized in order to be able to describe similar responses within each method.

Table 7

*Differences between Teacher and Principal Perceptions on Factors that Influence Choice of Accreditation Process*

Item	Teachers (n = 327)	Principals (n = 40)	Difference
Rigor of the Process	3.47	3.42	0.05
High Status of the Process	3.56	3.27	0.29
Tradition	2.56	3.02	0.46
Strength of the Process	3.63	3.73	0.10
Research Basis of the Process	3.74	3.75	0.01
Available Tools	3.79	3.85	0.06
Compliance of State Regulations	4.21	4.40	0.19
Cost	3.43	3.00	0.43

The responses regarding strengths were divided into six categories:

accountability, improvement process, communications, standards, goals and data.

Table 8 shows the number and percentage of responses in each category.

A total of 66 responses were given by AdvancED participants, however, three responses were either “Not Applicable” or a participant’s statement indicated that they were uncomfortable answering the question. Nebraska Frameworks participants gave 24 responses to this question with three of the responses being either “Not Applicable” or stating that they could not answer.

A very similar percentage of participants stated that the improvement process was a strength of their accreditation method. Some of the AdvancED participants explained:

Table 8

*What are the Strengths of Your Accreditation Model?*

Categories	AdvancED (n = 66)		Frameworks (n = 24)	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Improvement Process	38	57.5	14	58.3
Accountability	4	6.0	3	12.5
Communication and staff participation	10	15.0	3	12.5
Standards	3	4.5	0	0.0
Goals	5	8.0	0	0.0
Data	3	4.5	1	4.2
Not Applicable	3	4.5	3	12.5

“I think it gives a good glimpse of the inner workings of a school district and it does a good job of finding gaps or where the school district is lacking.” “District attempts to be prepared and stay on top of everything now, and in the future.” “Everyone is an active participant in the process. It identifies the strengths of our school system.” Frameworks participants reported similar comments about the improvement process: “Causes us to continually evaluate what we do.” “All of our people are involved in some way to make sure we fulfill the requirements of accreditation.”

As part of the overall improvement process, a couple of participants from both the AdvancED and Frameworks Accreditation schools mentioned the external review as being a strength of their accreditation method. Some AdvancED participants responded: “Conducting the survey and obtaining outside feedback was helpful to our improvement

process.” “Had outside individuals giving us ideas.” “It generally goes pretty well, we usually get good feedback.”

Some Framework participants responded about the review part of the improvement process as well, stating: “Involving others to take an outside look.”

We have a strategic plan in place before the external team comes to review what we are doing, so we share where we are in the process with the team and they provide us with an outsider’s view of what we are doing correctly and what we could improve upon. It is really nothing more than that – a chance to bring in outside experts to help with our improvement process.

Communication and staff participation was a category that also had a similar percentage of responses with 15% of responses from AdvancED schools and 12.5% of responses from Frameworks schools. A few examples of responses from AdvancED schools included: “Brought the entire staff together to work on this, so there was ownership and many different experts in various fields.” “Communication and regular meetings to discuss updates.” “During our accreditation process, there was a lot of open dialog. Everybody was involved in the process to encourage ownership.”

Responses from Frameworks participants included similar sentiments: “All teachers and staff buy into the programs needed.” “Teacher buy in.”

Another set of similar responses came in the category of accountability. An AdvancED participant responded that the process, “Holds us accountable to student achievement, student results and on a track of continuous improvement.” A Frameworks participant mentioned that a strength of their accreditation method was “Increased rigor in the classroom.”

Where the strengths of the programs differed was in the categories of standards, goals and data. For example, an AdvancED participant explained, “I feel that the quality of the AdvancED standards best meet where we strive for our school district to be.” Another mentioned that the process provides a “Focus on goals for improvement.” No Frameworks participant specifically mentioned the Frameworks rubric itself or school improvement goals as being a strength of the accreditation method.

The second open-ended question asked participants what they perceived to be the weaknesses of their accreditation method. There were 71 responses from AdvancED participants and 25 responses from Frameworks participants. Five (5) different categories of responses were found between the two accreditation methods. However, three of the five categories were not shared between the two methods. Table 9, which lists the number and percentage of responses for each category, shows that three categories have responses in only one method.

As seen in Table 9, approximately one-third of the responses from AdvancED participants indicated that their accreditation method can be overwhelming. As one person put it, “the accreditation process can be overwhelming and some teachers get frustrated by the process.” Other AdvancED participants responded that: “It is a lot of work and it takes time away from teacher in-services.” “Requires ridiculous amounts of paper examples. Half the Amazon could’ve been saved if we could keep it digital.”



Table 9

*What are the Weaknesses of Your Accreditation Model?*

Categories	AdvancED (n = 71)		Frameworks (n = 25)	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Improvement Process	28	39	8	32
Lack of Involvement	14	20	5	20
Cost	3	4	0	0
Overwhelming	24	34	0	0
Lack of Time	0	0	5	20
N/A	2	3	7	28

Responses from Nebraska Frameworks participants indicated that the lack of time was an issue. The researcher made that a separate category due to the specific statements about time that the Frameworks participants used. For example, one person wrote, “Often there is a lack of time to meet. We lose site (sic) of what we need to be doing.” Other quotes were simply about time: “Time.” “Time is always a problem.” “Time to accomplish.” “Too little time.”

These statements indicated that time to do the work was a problem, but not the work itself. It is the overwhelming work that AdvancED participants cite. As one person stated: “The rigor is too much for our reduced amount of school improvement staff. We will be switching to Frameworks.”

Cost was also considered a weakness by some AdvancED participants. One simply wrote, “cost” as the weakness while another stated, “It costs money and the other does not.” One person emphasized the cost as being a weakness by stating: “For me, it is

paying a lot of money each year for a fancy banner/certificate to say we are AdvancED. Still jumping through the same hoops.”

The other difference was seen in the number of “not applicable” responses given to each accreditation method. As seen in Table 9, 28% of the responses from Frameworks participants indicated that they did not perceive a weakness in their accreditation method while only 3% of AdvancED participants that responded did not state a weakness.

Not all of the categories were different. The overall improvement process and lack of involvement were two categories of perceived weaknesses that had similar responses. In fact, over half the responses from each accreditation method fit into one of these two categories. Some of the AdvancED participants wrote:

“I feel as often as we talk about it, we still give a light sprinkle of the AdvancED requirements throughout the year compared to the saturation of the accreditation process when our cycle comes up for evaluation. I feel we can always do better with more exposure to the everyday actions that in the end result in our school district being accredited.”

“It feels artificial and doesn’t always lead to lasting change.”

“It follows trends, not necessarily what’s good for kids.”

“Not always aligned with what we believe to be important and often pulls resources away from other initiatives.”

Other AdvancEd participants commented specifically on the classroom observations that were part of the review process:

“Some staff felt that the reviewers weren’t in rooms long enough to see what they were looking for, staff were not able to explain to reviewers what they saw or would be missing when they left before a lesson was complete. Possibly the review needed to take place over more days or for a longer duration.”

“They only stayed in classrooms for a short period of time. They docked us for not having specific things in place, but they weren’t in the classroom long enough to see that it was used, just not while they were there.”

“They were only in our rooms for 10 minutes and could not observe all the APL strategies in action and thus said not observed and “dinged” us on lack of use.”

Nebraska Frameworks participants also noted some weakness in the overall improvement process: “At times, it seems like we are jumping hoops or doing things because we have to do things.” “Not enough checkpoints throughout the cycle.” “We have a process with phases and a steering committee in place. But with new administration, we haven’t followed the plan for many years.” “We only go over the process the fifth year when it’s our turn to have accreditation.”

The lack of involvement by staff was also seen as a weakness by participants in both accreditation methods. Some AdvancED participants wrote: “A small number of staff members are involved in the process.” “Getting everyone involved.” “It needs to be shared with the staff and community so that they have a clear understanding of the importance of the process and results.” “Need to have more teachers involved in breaking down data. Additionally, need to have teachers leading the charge in AdvancED process and the long-term strategic planning for the district.”

Meanwhile, some Nebraska Frameworks participants responded:

“Many veteran staff, need to know how to continue the process in their absence.”

“Perhaps because I am only a teacher – and not involved as a committee member – I am probably not as aware of the accreditation method as I should be. We are updated at least yearly and more involved during the actual process, but then it is largely forgotten by me.”

“We have had a high turnover in administration and older teachers who were a part of the CIP/SIP program who are no longer with us. We have our team

recommend that we need to be systematic in our approach so we can plug a new person in to our school system and/or our CIP team and not skip a beat.”

## Summary

The purpose of this study was to determine the most important factors that influence accreditation in Nebraska Accredited public schools. In order to determine the important factors, a survey was sent to teachers and administrators in accredited public schools across the state. There were 383 usable responses with 257 of those responses from AdvancED schools and 126 coming from schools that identify as either Nebraska Frameworks or both AdvancED and Frameworks.

Table 10

### *Summary of Major Findings*

Item	AdvancED		Nebraska Frameworks	
	Mean Score	Standard Deviation	Mean Score	Standard Deviation
<i>Factors that influence school improvement process</i>				
District Strategic Plans or Initiatives	3.95	.773	3.95	.718
NeSA Assessment Scores	3.90	.964	3.95	.980
AdvancED Standards or Frameworks Rubric	3.83	.847	3.78	.875
<i>Factors that influence choice of Accreditation Method</i>				
Compliance of state regulations	4.27	.772	4.21	.837
Available tools and resources	3.82	.824	3.70	.818
Cost	3.38	.923	3.33	1.100
Tradition	2.63	1.076	2.71	.957

To examine what factors were important, including the AdvancED Standards of Quality and the Nebraska Frameworks rubric, participants were asked to rate how important they perceived various factors were to their accreditation method. Table 10 shows a summary of those ratings with a side by side comparison of mean scores and standard deviations from AdvancED schools and Frameworks schools. According to the responses in the survey, the AdvancED Standards were a moderately important factor that influences the school improvement process with a mean score of 3.83. However, District Strategic Plans or Initiatives and Nebraska State Accountability (NeSA) Assessment scores both rated higher with mean scores of 3.95 and 3.90 respectively. The Nebraska Frameworks rubric was also moderately important to the school improvement process in schools that identify as Frameworks accredited. However, with a mean score of 3.78, the Frameworks rubric was fourth behind District Strategic Plans or Initiatives (3.95), NeSA Assessment Scores (3.95), and Teacher Perception (3.89).

To further determine the importance of the AdvancED Standards of Quality and the Nebraska Frameworks rubric, participants were asked how often they reflect on the standards or on the rubric and how important they are to their district's strategic planning efforts. A majority of participants from both sets of schools stated that they reflect on the standards or rubric throughout the school year. Also, participants were asked to rate how important the AdvancED Standards or the Nebraska Frameworks rubric were to their strategic planning process. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being not at all important and 5 being extremely important, the mean score for AdvancED participants was 3.79. The mean score for Nebraska Frameworks participants was 3.43.

Both accreditation methods were quite similar regarding how schools responded to external visits. Nearly identical percentages of participants responded that they met to discuss the visit, engaged in professional development and created a formal action plan. Most other possible responses were within two percentage points, with the exception that more AdvancED participants indicated that they started using data differently while more Frameworks participants indicated that they purchased new programs.

Participants were also asked to rate the level of importance certain factors play in why schools choose their accreditation model. Compliance with state regulations was the number one factor for both accreditation models. The mean score for AdvancED participants was 4.27 and the mean score for Frameworks participants was 4.21. As seen in Table 10, cost and tradition were two of the lowest scoring factors for both accreditation methods.

When looking at the differences in the perceptions of principals and teachers, it was found that principals rated the importance of district strategic plans or initiatives significantly higher than teachers. There was no real difference between principals and teachers regarding the importance of Nebraska State Accountability (NeSA) Assessments, but principals rated the importance of norm-referenced tests significantly higher. Principals also rated the importance of teacher perceptions significantly higher than teachers did but there was no difference in the importance of administrator perceptions. Both principals and teachers rated the use of the AdvancED Standards or the Nebraska Frameworks rubric from moderate to very important and there was no statistical difference between their ratings. Tradition and costs were also shown to have

significant differences between principals and teachers as well, but both were rated as only moderately important.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Discussion**

#### **Introduction**

Chapter 5, the final chapter of this study, presents a commentary based on the results noted in this dissertation. It includes the summary of the study itself and a discussion of the major findings and implications of the results. It will also include both recommendations for further study as well as recommendations for schools and the Nebraska Department of Education.

#### **Summary of the Research**

For as long as there have been European settlements in America, education has been seen as a necessity to protect freedom and democracy, thus justifying the state's involvement in regulating and standardizing education. In Nebraska, the establishment of a free public school system was one of the first acts of the territorial legislature (Olson & Naugle, 1997). Throughout the history of Nebraska, the state has enforced minimum standards and competencies for approval and accreditation of Nebraska schools. In the late 1800's, the North Central Association (NCA) was formed by colleges and secondary schools in order to "approach national unity with respect to the educational policies and procedures adopted" (Davis, 1945, p. 13). Over time, both the Nebraska Department of Education and the North Central Association began accrediting schools in the state. In its recent history, the NCA joined forces with other regional accrediting associations to create AdvancED, an international accrediting agency. Today, schools in Nebraska can choose to seek Nebraska Accreditation or AdvancED Accreditation.



The purpose of this study was to determine the critical factors of accreditation that influence Nebraska AdvancED and Nebraska Frameworks Accredited public schools and districts. It examined literature and data related to the research question, “What are the most important factors that influence accreditation in Nebraska accredited public schools and districts?” Data that was collected in this study sought to answer the following sub questions:

1. How important are the AdvancED Standards of Quality to school improvement activities in AdvancED schools?
2. How important is the Nebraska Frameworks Rubric to school improvement activities in Nebraska Frameworks schools?
3. What actions were most likely taken in response to external visits for both accreditation models?
4. What are the most important factors when choosing an accreditation model?
5. What are the major similarities and differences between administrator and teacher perception of accreditation activities?

After receiving permission from superintendents, a survey was sent to teachers and administrators in schools that were chosen to provide a stratified sample of responses. A total of 383 usable responses were recorded.

The first finding regarding what drives school improvement in schools determined that the AdvancED Standards and the Nebraska Frameworks Rubric were both high on the list but did not have as high a mean score as other factors. In both AdvancED and Nebraska Frameworks schools, district-wide strategic plans or initiatives were rated as

having the most influence upon School improvement planning. This was followed closely by the Nebraska State Accountability (NeSA) Assessments. Therefore, it can be concluded that the standards and the rubric are important, but district plans and the public accountability that comes with state testing are more important than the process selected to achieve accreditation.

Since strategic plans or initiatives were seen as being an important factor to improvement in schools, it became highly interesting to examine the level of influence the AdvancED Standards and the Nebraska Frameworks Rubric had on the strategic planning process. When asked on a five-point Likert scale with 1 meaning not at all important and 5 meaning extremely important, the mean score from AdvancED schools was 3.79 while the mean score for Nebraska Frameworks Schools was 3.43. Also, the data showed that many participants believe that they reflected on the standards or the rubric throughout the school year. For AdvancED schools, 61% of the participants marked that they reflected on the standards throughout the year, while 55% of the Nebraska Frameworks participants indicated the same thing about the rubric. This data shows that the standards and the rubric are fairly important to schools and that the standards are slightly more important to schools than the rubric.

Part of the accreditation process for both AdvancED schools and Nebraska Frameworks schools was to have an external review every 5 years. The idea of having an internal review followed by an external review from a trained committee started in Nebraska in 1957 with AdvancED following in 1962. With the 60 years of external visit experience in Nebraska, it should come as no surprise that the responses to these external

visits were very similar between the two accreditation methods. The top three responses were the same with nearly identical percentages of participants indicating that their school engaged in these activities after their visit. The top three responses with their AdvancED percentage and Frameworks percentage in parenthesis were: had a meeting to discuss the visit (85%, 85%), engaged in professional development (82%, 80%), and created a formal action plan (70%, 72%).

Another area in which responses were very similar for both processes selected to achieve accreditation was in the rating of the level of importance different factors play in why schools have chosen their accreditation method. A five-point Likert scale with 1 meaning not at all important and 5 meaning extremely important, was also used in this section. Compliance of state regulations turned out to be a very important factor for both methods with AdvancED schools having a mean score of 4.27 and Nebraska Frameworks schools having a mean score of 4.21. This statistic makes sense as current state law mandates that all schools be accredited (Nebraska Legislature, 2010).

Also examined were the perceptions of principals and teachers. In the examination of the factors that influence school improvement activities, most perceptions were found to be quite similar but there were some significant differences. For example, there was not a significant difference regarding the importance of administrator's perceptions, but principals rated teacher perceptions significantly higher. Otherwise, the areas with significant differences between teacher and principals' perceptions were not significant. For instance, principals rated tradition significantly higher than teachers did, but neither group saw tradition as being very important as a reason for choosing an

accreditation method. So while there were differences between teacher and principal perceptions, the data did not indicate that the differences played a major factor in accreditation and school improvement activities.

The importance of open-ended questions was evident by the variety of responses that were provided. One question asked about the strengths of their accreditation method and the other question asked about the weaknesses of their accreditation method. There weren't any major differences between responses from AdvancED and Frameworks participants in regard to the strengths of their method. Responses indicated that the overall improvement process was a strength. The differences in weaknesses, however, could point to an important factor in choice of accreditation methods. Approximately one-third of the open-ended responses from AdvancED participants were related to how overwhelming they thought the process was. While 20% of the responses from Frameworks participants stated that lack of time was a weakness, the researcher separated the two categories because the AdvancED responses were more about the difficulty of the process where the Frameworks responses were more about not having the time to do the work. The AdvancED process was described by participants as being a lot of work, taking a great deal of paperwork and being cumbersome. In order to attain AdvancED accreditation, schools must complete a self-assessment and other documentation, host an external visit and then submit a report on the progress it has made within two years of the visit (AdvancED, 2015). This overwhelming nature of the process could be a reason that schools choose Frameworks instead of AdvancED. In fact, one person responded, "The

rigor is too much for our reduced amount of school improvement staff. We will be switching to Frameworks.”

### **Significance of the Findings**

As previously stated, all public schools in Nebraska must be accredited. The purpose of accreditation is to ensure every child is enrolled in a school that meets criteria for a quality education. Public schools in Nebraska have two accreditation methods to choose from, AdvancED and Nebraska Frameworks. This descriptive study produced some interesting findings that uncovered possible improvements that could be made to each accreditation process.

The data from this study seems to indicate that there is not a difference in the perception of factors that influence accreditation in Nebraska public schools. The AdvancED standards and the Nebraska Frameworks rubric are moderately important to schools, but not as important as the district strategic planning process. Schools may consider the standards or the rubric when developing strategic plans, but the average rating was just above moderately important. This study would suggest that the development of a process to use the AdvancED Standards or the Nebraska Frameworks in the creation of strategic plans would increase the importance of the Standards or Frameworks to the schools that use them. It would also reduce the stress felt by faculty and staff by combining two processes into one. The Nebraska Department of Education could also reduce the overwhelming feeling teachers get, especially with the AdvancED process, by combining some requirements of AQuESTT with the accreditation process.

Every school participates in an external review every five years. Again, regardless of accreditation method, responses revealed that a majority of schools engaged in three actions due to the external visit: had a meeting to discuss the visit, had professional development, and created a formal action plan. One of the surprises of the study came out here in that only 32% of participants from AdvancED schools indicated that they wrote an accreditation progress report while 23% of Frameworks participants indicated that they wrote an accreditation progress report. This report was required of AdvancED schools within two years of the visit but was not required for Frameworks schools. Both accreditation methods had a standard that expected schools to engage in continuous improvement. This study would indicate that schools or districts, regardless of the selected accreditation process, needed to emphasize a follow-up to the visit so that they demonstrate how they used the report from the external visit team to make improvements. Since reporting on requirements was required of AdvancED schools, two possible reasons for the low percentage were considered. First, that many people who responded were in a school that was still in its two-year window and therefore, had not yet completed a progress report. Second, the need to report on their progress was not effectively communicated to all staff in a school or district. If it is the second reason, then AdvancED accredited schools need to communicate the requirements to all stakeholder groups to ensure that everyone understands what progress has been made.

It was also previously demonstrated that strategic planning has played an important role in school improvement. The results of the external visit could be tied into the strategic planning process giving schools and districts a way to increase the

importance of the AdvancED Standards or the Nebraska Frameworks Rubric. What could have made the AdvancED process overwhelming and the Nebraska Frameworks time consuming was the fact that the strategic planning process and the accreditation process in some schools were separate. Using the results of the external visit will focus the process for schools and districts on a researched based set of criteria and it will reduce the workload for schools. If schools were to use the Standards or Frameworks to build their strategic plan, schools would then reduce the effort and time spent on their accreditation and school improvement activities because they would be engaged in one process and not two. This is especially true in AdvancED schools where the process is often thought of as being overwhelming.

Another surprise in the research came in looking at the important factors in choosing an accreditation model. Since there is a cost to be AdvancED accredited but there is no cost to being Nebraska Frameworks accredited, one would think that cost could have been a significant factor in the choice of accreditation methods, but it really wasn't. Also, since accreditation of schools has been around for more than 100 years, it would make sense that tradition would have been a more important factor than it was. If a school has been AdvancED accredited since the early 1900's, it may not want to change now. However, tradition was the lowest scoring factor in both sets of accreditation models. The fact that compliance of state standards had, by far, the highest mean score of all the important factors given, may demonstrate that AdvancED may need to work harder to maintain its presence in Nebraska. Completing AdvancED Accreditation is a voluntary step for schools in this state. Many open-ended responses indicated that it is an

overwhelming process. The Nebraska Frameworks model requires less paperwork, a shorter external visit and is offered at no cost. If the AdvancED process is not perceived as more rigorous, more beneficial and not seen as producing a higher status for schools, then why would they maintain AdvancED Accreditation? AdvancED may need to find a way to streamline its process while maintaining and communicating rigorous standards.

### **Suggestions for Further Research**

This quantitative descriptive research focused on the factors that influence accreditation. Other research related to the topic came to mind through this study. One of the sub-questions of this research regarded what factors influenced the choice of accreditation models. A next step could be to conduct an in-depth qualitative study to determine why specific schools have chosen the accreditation method that they are using.

It came to light during this study that at least one school switched the accreditation method that they were using. Are there other schools that have switched and if so, why? A further research study could be to examine those schools who have switched to determine what factors led them to switching accreditation methods.

Since many AdvancED participants explained that the AdvancED process can be overwhelming, an interesting research question could center on whether or not there is a correlation between AdvancED and higher levels of student achievement. While the researcher would need to control for similar demographics, data could be run to determine whether or not AdvancED schools outperform Nebraska Frameworks schools. This could help schools decide if the extra work is worth it.



## Summary

Throughout the history of public schools in Nebraska, requirements for approval and accreditation have existed. The current requirement that all public schools be accredited was written into law in the early 1990's based on the "intent of the legislature that all public school students shall have access to all educational services required of accredited schools" (Nebraska Legislature, 2010). This study has demonstrated that teachers and administrators perceive their process as meeting the intent of the legislature, regardless of which process is used to achieve accreditation and that both processes are perceived to meet the goal of school improvement.

This dissertation has demonstrated several similarities in the perceptions of both accreditation processes. The top factors that influence the school improvement process were the same, the top responses to the external visit were the same and the most important factors when choosing an accreditation process were the same. The biggest difference seemed to be that many participants from AdvancED schools viewed their process as being overwhelming. In the end, it is the school's or district's choice in how they use the accreditation process that determine the factors that influence their accreditation.

Caution is urged in these findings because some discrepancies between the Likert score responses and the open-ended responses were found. For example, cost of the accreditation model was not seen as very important, but it was listed multiple times as a weakness of the AdvancED model. While there is no evidence that participants did not respond truthfully, it is important that this limitation be noted.

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**Appendix A**

**IRB Approval**



## Official Approval Letter for IRB project #16041 - New Project Form

April 18, 2016

David Gibbons  
 Department of Educational Administration  
 116 W 8th St Schuyler, NE 68661

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

IRB Number: 20160416041 EX  
 Project ID: 16041  
 Project Title: Factors That Influence Accreditation in Nebraska Public Schools and Districts

Dear David:

This letter is to officially notify you of the certification of exemption of your project. 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.

You are authorized to implement this study as of the Date of Exemption Determination: 04/18/2016.

o Exempt review category: 2  
 o Date of Exemption Determination: 4/18/2016  
 o Funding: N/A

1. Since your informed consent form will appear on-line, please include the IRB approval number (IRB#20160416041EX) in the on-line consent document. If you need to make changes to the document, please submit the revised document to the IRB for review and approval prior to using it.

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 402-472-6965.

Sincerely,

Becky R. Freeman, CIP  
 for the IRB



**Appendix B**

**Questionnaire from Qualtrics**

## Questionnaire from Qualtrics

### Factors That Influence Accreditation

Q1 This is a research project that focuses on the factors that influence accreditation in Nebraska public schools and districts. In order to participate you must be 19 years of age or older and a teacher or administrator in a Nebraska public school or district. Participation in this study will require approximately 15 minutes. You will be asked to answer questions on a web-based survey on your own personal or school computer. There are no known risks or discomforts associated with this research. The results of this study will be used to help develop an understanding of why public schools and districts in Nebraska choose one accreditation model over the other and will help the accrediting agencies better serve the schools in Nebraska. Your responses to this survey will be kept anonymous. Personal data is not being collected in this survey so there is no way to connect responses to individuals. You may ask any questions concerning this research at any time by contacting Dave Gibbons at 402-352-3516 or s-dgibbon2@unl.edu. You may also research Dr. Jody Isernhagen at jisernhagen3@unl.edu. If you would like to speak to someone else, please call the Research Compliance Services Office at 402-472-6965 or irb@unl.edu. Participation in this study is voluntary. You can refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without harming your relationship with the researchers or the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, or in any other way receive a penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You are voluntarily making a decision whether or not to participate in this research study. By clicking on the I agree button below, your consent to participate is implied. You should print a copy of this page for your records. IRB Approval: IRB#20160416041EX

Q38 Do you agree to the consent form?

- agree (1)
- disagree (2)

If agree Is Selected, Then Skip To DemographicsIf disagree Is Selected, Then Skip To End of Survey

## Q4 Demographics

Q5 Which Accreditation Process does your school or district use? (Choose One)

- AdvancED (1)
- Nebraska Frameworks (2)
- Both (3)

Q6 Which best describes your position within your school or district? (Choose One)

- Administrator (1)
- Teacher (2)
- Other (please specify) (3) \_\_\_\_\_

Q7 Are you now or have you ever been on your school or district's steering committee?

- Currently involved (1)
- Recently but no longer involved (2)
- Not involved for more than five years (3)
- Never involved (4)

## Q8 Factors That Influence Your School Improvement Process

Q9 Answer these questions by choosing the number on the scale that best corresponds to the level of importance you place on the factors that influence your school improvement process. On the scale, one (1) equals not at all important while five (5) equals Extremely important.

### Q10 NeSA Assessment Scores

- Not at all important (1)
- Slightly important (2)
- Moderately important (3)
- Very important (4)
- Extremely important (5)

### Q11 Norm-referenced test scores

- Not at all important (1)
- Slightly important (2)
- Moderately important (3)
- Very important (4)
- Extremely important (5)

### Q13 Administrator perceptions

- Not at all important (1)
- Slightly important (2)
- Moderately important (3)
- Very important (4)
- Extremely important (5)

### Q14 Teacher perceptions

- Not at all important (1)
- Slightly important (2)
- Moderately important (3)
- Very important (4)
- Extremely important (5)

### Q15 Stakeholder feedback

- Not at all important (1)
- Slightly important (2)
- Moderately important (3)
- Very important (4)
- Extremely important (5)

## Q16 AdvancED Standards of Quality

- Not at all important (1)
- Slightly important (2)
- Moderately important (3)
- Very important (4)
- Extremely important (5)

## Q17 Nebraska Frameworks rubric

- Not at all important (1)
- Slightly important (2)
- Moderately important (3)
- Very important (4)
- Extremely important (5)

## Q18 Current trends in education

- Not at all important (1)
- Slightly important (2)
- Moderately important (3)
- Very important (4)
- Extremely important (5)

## Q19 District strategic plans or initiatives

- Not at all important (1)
- Slightly important (2)
- Moderately important (3)
- Very important (4)
- Extremely important (5)

## Q20 Other factors not listed

- Not at all important (1)
- Slightly important (2)
- Moderately important (3)
- Very important (4)
- Extremely important (5)

Q21 Choose the best response according to your accreditation process.

Q22 How often does your school reflect on the accreditation standards or rubric?

- Don't know (1)
- Throughout the school year (2)
- Once during a school year (3)
- Every two years (4)
- Once every five-year cycle (5)

Q23 How often does your school complete an executive summary or update the school's profile?

- Don't know (1)
- Throughout the school year (2)
- Once during a school year (3)
- Every two years (4)
- Once every five-year cycle (5)

Q24 How important are the AdvancED Accreditation Standards or the Nebraska Frameworks Rubric to the strategic planning process in your school or district?

- Not at all important (1)
- Slightly important (2)
- Moderately important (3)
- Very important (4)
- Extremely important (5)



Q25 On a scale from one to five with one being not at all important and five being extremely important, rate how important the following factors are in choosing your accreditation process.

Q26 Rigor of the process

- Not at all important (1)
- Slightly important (2)
- Moderately important (3)
- Very important (4)
- Extremely important (5)

Q27 High status of the process

- Not at all important (1)
- Slightly important (2)
- Moderately important (3)
- Very important (4)
- Extremely important (5)

Q28 Tradition (we've always done it that way)

- Not at all important (1)
- Slightly important (2)
- Moderately important (3)
- Very important (4)
- Extremely important (5)

Q27 Strength of the process

- Not at all important (1)
- Slightly important (2)
- Moderately important (3)
- Very important (4)
- Extremely important (5)

Q28 Research basis of the process

- Not at all important (1)
- Slightly important (2)
- Moderately important (3)
- Very important (4)
- Extremely important (5)

## Q29 Available tools and resources

- Not at all important (1)
- Slightly important (2)
- Moderately important (3)
- Very important (4)
- Extremely important (5)

## Q30 Compliance of state regulations

- Not at all important (1)
- Slightly important (2)
- Moderately important (3)
- Very important (4)
- Extremely important (5)

## Q31 Cost

- Not at all important (1)
- Slightly important (2)
- Moderately important (3)
- Very important (4)
- Extremely important (5)

Q32 Actions Taken Following an External Visit (AdvancED and Nebraska Frameworks)

Q33 Place a check next to each of the actions that you took in response to your last external visit. Mark all that apply.

- Had a meeting to discuss the visit (1)
- Created a formal action plan (2)
- Developed new policy (3)
- Made staffing changes (4)
- Engaged in professional development (5)
- Wrote an accreditation progress report (6)
- Brought in an outside consultant (7)
- Made changes to the curriculum (8)
- Purchased new programs (9)
- Increased technology usage (10)
- Used data differently (11)
- Developed a new strategic plan (12)
- Others: (please specify) (13) \_\_\_\_\_

Q34 Open Ended Questions Please add any comments you'd like to make regarding the strengths and weaknesses of your accreditation method.

Q35 What are the strengths of your accreditation method?

Q37 What are the weaknesses of your accreditation method?

## **Appendix C**

### **5-Year External Visit Schedule**

**2015-16 SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT VISITATION SCHEDULE FOR STATE ACCREDITED SCHOOLS - FRAMEWORKS**  
 (An external team visit is required before or during the scheduled year- Rule 10-009.01B)

2015-2016	2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020
<b>PUBLIC:</b> Allen Consolidated Alma Amherst Bloomfield Callaway Cambridge Clarkson Crofton Eustis-Farnam Hemingford Loup County McCool Junction Milford Oakland Craig Plainview Rock County West Point Wynot	<b>PUBLIC:</b> Arapahoe Bancroft-Rosalie Bertrand Blue Hill Bruning-Davenport Unified Cody-Kilgore Dorchester Elm Creek Elmwood-Murdock Giltner Hayes Center Litchfield Malcolm Pleasanton Shelton Shickley Sioux County Sterling Summer-Eddyville-Miller Waurneta-Palisade Weeping Water	<b>PUBLIC:</b> Arcadia Aurora Axtell Community Brady Diller-Osell Hartington-Newcastle Public School Hay Springs High Plains Loomis Lyons-Decatur Northeast Medicine Valley Minden Mullen Newman Grove Osmond Overton Paxton Riverside Public School Southwest St. Edward Thedford Tri County	<b>PUBLIC:</b> Anselmo-Merna Anselmo Centennial Central Valley Public School Deshler Elkhorn Valley Filmore Central Freeman Harvard Humphrey Keya Paha County Leigh Meridian Minatare Sargent Seward Silver Lake Southern Dist 1 Southern Valley Sutton Wallace Wausa Wilcox-Hildreth Yutan Northern Tier Schools: -Chambers -Elgin -Ewing -Lynch -Nebraska Unified Dist No 1 -Niobrara -Stuart -West Boyd -Wheeler Central <b>NON-PUBLIC:</b> Columbus: St. Anthony Columbus: St. Bonaventure Columbus: St. Isidore Omaha: Sacred Heart Omaha: St. Bernard Omaha: St. James-Seton Omaha: St. Joan of Arc Omaha: St. Philip Neri	<b>PUBLIC:</b> Arthur County Elba Elwood Emerson-Hubbard Exeter-Milligan Hitchcock County Kearsaw Lewiston Consolidated Logan View Maywood McCook McPherson County Palmer Pawnee City South Sioux City Stapleton Tekamah-Herman Thayer Central West Holt Winside Wisner-Pilger <b>Special Purpose School:</b> Chadron: Pine Ridge Job Corps <b>NON-PUBLIC:</b> David City: Aquinas-St. Mary North Platte: North Platte Catholic Omaha: All Saints Catholic Omaha: Jesuit Academy Omaha: Madonna School Atkinson: St. Joseph's School Clarkson: St. John Neumann Creighton: St. Ludger Elem Crofton: St. Rose of Lima Dodge: St. Wenceslaus Howells: Howells Catholic Madison: St. Leonard Catholic Osmond: St. Mary's School Wayne: St. Mary's School
<b>NON-PUBLIC:</b> Albion: St. Michaels Bow Valley: East Catholic Columbus: St. Isidore Fordyce: West Catholic Hartington: Holy Trinity Lincoln: Parkview Christian Nebr. City: Lourdes Central Omaha: Holy Name Omaha: St. Pius X/ St. Leo Omaha: St. Robert Bellarmine Winnebago: St. Augustine	<b>Special Purpose School:</b> Omaha: NE Correctional Youth Fac	<b>NON-PUBLIC:</b> Elgin: Pope John XXIII Elgin: St. Boniface Hartington: Cedar Catholic Omaha Consortium: -Holy Cross -Our Lady of Lourdes -St. Bernadette -St. Thomas More -Sts. Peter & Paul Omaha: St. Margaret Mary Omaha: St. Vincent DePaul Omaha: St. Wenceslaus Ralston: St. Gerald S. Sioux City: St. Michaels	<b>NON-PUBLIC:</b> Columbus: St. Anthony Columbus: St. Bonaventure Columbus: St. Isidore Omaha: Sacred Heart Omaha: St. Bernard Omaha: St. James-Seton Omaha: St. Joan of Arc Omaha: St. Philip Neri	<b>NON-PUBLIC:</b> Columbus: St. Anthony Lindsay: Holy Family School

2015-16 Advanced EXTERNAL REVIEW VISIT SCHEDULE



Italics = Non-Public Blue=Unit  
 Bold = Systems Candidate  
 BOLD CAPS = SYSTEMS ACCREDITED

2015-2016	2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020
ASSIST Reports are due at least 30 days prior to External Review visit <b>External Review Due by</b> April 1, 2016	ASSIST Reports are due at least 30 days prior to External Review visit <b>External Review Due by</b> April 1, 2017	ASSIST Reports are due at least 30 days prior to External Review visit <b>External Review Due by</b> April 1, 2018	ASSIST Reports are due at least 30 days prior to External Review visit <b>External Review Due by</b> April 1, 2019	ASSIST Reports are due at least 30 days prior to External Review visit <b>External Review Due by</b> April 1, 2020
Arlington Public Schools	ADAMS CENTRAL	ALLIANCE	Beatrice HS	Ainsworth HS
Ashland-Greenwood HS	Bayard Public	Arnold Public	CENTURA	Banner County Schools
Battle Creek HS	BENNINGTON	Auburn HS	CHADRON	BELLEUE
Cedar Bluffs Public School	BLAIR	Boys Town High, Wegner Middle	Christ Lutheran Elem-Norfolk	Bridgeport
CENTRAL CITY	Chase County Schools	Brownell Talbot School	Gibson	Broken Bow HS
COZAD	CONESTOGA	COLUMBUS	Grand Island Sr High, 3 Middle Schools	Bunwell Public School
FALLS CITY	Doughan-Trumbull PS	Dundy County HS	HOLDREGE	Creek Valley HS
FREMONT	Geneva North	EAST BUTLER	LOUISVILLE	Creighton Community HS
Garden County HS	GOTHENBURG	Fairbury Jr./Sr. HS	MADISON	Cross County
GERING	Grand Is Dio-G.I. Central Cath HS	Hershey Public	Millard	DAVID CITY
Gordon-Rushville HS	Hampton Public	Homestead Community Schools	Mitchell	DOUGLAS COUNTY
Gr Island Dio-Kearney Catholic	Hyannis Area Schools	Kimball Jr./Sr. HS	NEBRASKA CITY	ELKHORN
GREINA	Kearney West HS	Lakeview Community HS	NORRIS	Fort Calhoun
HASTINGS	Heartland Comm Schools	Loup City HS	North Bend Central HS	Franklin Public Schools
Hartland Comm Schools	Laurel-Concord-Coleridge	Morrill HS	NORTH PLATTE	Friend Public School
Humboldt-Table Rock-Speinauer HS	Leviton Public Schools	Neigh-Okdale Middle/High	Northwest HS, Grand Island	Fullerton HS
JOHNSON COUNTY CENTRAL	Lincoln Dio-Plus X HS, Lincoln	Omaha Dio-Arch, Bergan	Omaha Dio-St. Columbkille, Papillon	Howells-Dodge
Kearney HS	Norfolk High School	Omaha Dio-Marian HS	Omaha Dio-St. Mary, Bellevue	Johnson-Brock Public School
Lexington	Omaha Dio-Cedar Catholic	Omaha Dio-Scotus Cath HS, Col.	O'Neill	Lincoln Lutheran Middle/High
Lincoln Dio-Bishop Neumann, Wahoo	Omaha Dio-Creighton Prep	Palmyra OR 1	Ord	Mead
Lincoln Dio-Sacred Heart, Falls City	Omaha Dio-Daniel Gross HS	Potter-Dix Community Sch	Pierce	Ogallala High, Prairie View
Lincoln Dio-St. Cecilia HS, Hastings	Omaha Dio-Guardian Angels C Cath	SCHUYLER	RALSTON	Omaha Public Schools
Maxwell	Omaha Dio-Norfolk Cath (Unit 2)	SOUTH CENTRAL NE UNIFIED HS	Ravenna Jr./Sr. HS	Omaha Dio-Christ the King Elem
Near Non Public Lincoln Christian	Omaha Dio-Skutt Cath HS	St. Francis of Assisi, Humphrey	RAYMOND CENTRAL	Omaha Dio-Duchesne Academy
Osceola Public Schools	Omaha Dio-St. Cecilia Cathedral	Syracuse-Dunbar-Awoca High Sch	Sandhills HS, Dunning	Omaha Dio-Mary Our Queen
PLATTSMOUTH	Omaha Dio-St. Mary's Sch, O'Neill	Street School Network-Omaha Street Sch	Sidney	Omaha Dio-Mercy HS
Ponca HS	Santee Community School	Univ. of Nebraska High School	Twin River HS	Omaha Dio-Mt. Michael (Elkhorn)
Randolph HS	Scribner-Snyder HS	Waverly	WAYNE	Omaha Dio-Roncalli Cath. HS
Red Cloud HS	Stanton	Westside Community Schools	Wood River Rural	Omaha Dio-St. Matthew (Bellevue)
Shelby-Rising City	Stapleton Public Schools	Wahoo Public	Primrose School of Legacy, Omaha	Omaha Dio-St. Stephen the Martyr
St. Paul	Urno Ho Nation Public School	Wakefield Community School	Pender	PAPILLION LA VISTA
Superior Elem and Jr/Sr High	WAVERLY	Walbridge Public	Perkins County	Perkins County
Sutherland Public	Westside Community Schools	Walthill Public School	Scottsbluff	Scottsbluff
Wahoo Public	Wakefield Community School	Walbridge Public	SPRINGFIELD-PLATTEVIEW	SPRINGFIELD-PLATTEVIEW
Walthill Public School	Walbridge Public	Winnemago Public School	Valentine	Valentine
Walbridge Public	Winnemago Public School	YORK		

**Appendix D**

**Permission Letter to Superintendents**

## Dave Gibbons

116 W. 8<sup>th</sup> Schuyler, NE 68661

Phone: 402-352-3516 Cell: 402-615-4008 E-Mail: gibbonsdave@msn.com

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April 20, 2016

Dear Superintendent,

I am a doctoral student at the University of Nebraska Lincoln. I am currently doing research for a doctoral dissertation regarding the factors that influence choice of accreditation models in Nebraska public schools and districts. The IRB approval number is: 20160416041 EX

I am asking your permission to send an electronic survey to the principals and certified staff in your schools. The survey should take approximately fifteen minutes to complete and there are no known risks to completing this survey. Personal information will not be collected so the privacy of the participants and their schools will be respected.

I have enclosed a self-addressed stamped envelope for your reply or you can email me at gibbonsdave@msn.com with your reply. Please feel free to call me on my cell phone or email me if you have any questions. My cell number is 402-615-4008.

Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Dave Gibbons

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Yes, Dave Gibbons is welcomed to survey our staff.

No, please do not survey our staff at this time.

School District:

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Superintendent:

Signed \_\_\_\_\_



**Appendix E**

**Survey Cover Letter**

Dave Gibbons  
116 W. 8<sup>th</sup> Street  
Schuyler, NE 68661  
s-dgibbon2@unl.edu

Dear

I am writing to invite you to participate in a research study titled: Factors That Influence Accreditation in Nebraska Public Districts and Schools. The purpose of this study is to determine the critical factors of accreditation that influence Nebraska AdvancED and Nebraska Frameworks Accredited public schools and districts. The IRB approval number is: 20160416041 EX.

I am asking that you take about 15 minutes of your time to respond to the online survey linked below regarding your experience with your school's accreditation process.

Please know that your responses will remain anonymous and that only aggregated information will be shared. There are no known risks for this survey and you may opt out of any part of it if you are uncomfortable with responding. Your completing the survey implies an informed consent.

Your assistance in returning the survey will help develop an understanding of why public schools and districts in Nebraska choose one accreditation model over the other. Please contact me if you have any questions or if you would like to see the completed results.

Link to the survey: [https://unlcba.az1.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV\\_9YtiEhBODIIKmRT](https://unlcba.az1.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_9YtiEhBODIIKmRT)

Sincerely,

David Gibbons  
Doctoral Candidate  
University of Nebraska – Lincoln

**Appendix F**

**Follow-up Letter 1**

Dear << Participant >> ,

Last week, you were sent a survey regarding Factors That Influence Accreditation in your school. If you have already completed it, I thank you so much for your participation.

If you have not yet returned the survey, I would greatly appreciate your help in completing and returning the survey. It should take less than fifteen minutes to complete it. I have provided a link to the survey here.

[https://unlcba.az1.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV\\_9YtiEhBODlIKmRT](https://unlcba.az1.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_9YtiEhBODlIKmRT)

Please be reminded that your response to this survey will help improve the accreditation process for public schools in Nebraska. Know that your responses will be strictly anonymous.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions.

Thank you,

Dave Gibbons  
dave.gibbons@huskers.unl.edu  
402-352-3516  
Doctoral Student  
University of Nebraska - Lincoln

**Appendix G**

**Follow-up Letter 2**

Dear << Participant, > >

This is a second gentle reminder about a survey regarding Factors That Influence Accreditation in your school that you received about three weeks ago. Since this is an anonymous survey, I do not have records regarding who has and who hasn't returned the survey. If you have already responded to the survey, I thank you.

If you have not yet returned the survey, I would greatly appreciate your help in completing and returning the survey. On average, it is taking less than 15 minutes to respond to the survey. I have provided another link to the survey here.

[https://unlcba.az1.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV\\_9YtiEhBODlIKmRT](https://unlcba.az1.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_9YtiEhBODlIKmRT)

Please be reminded that your response to this survey will help improve the accreditation process for public schools in Nebraska. Know that your responses will be strictly anonymous.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions.

Thank you,

Dave Gibbons  
[dave.gibbons@huskers.unl.edu](mailto:dave.gibbons@huskers.unl.edu)  
402-352-3516  
Doctoral Student  
University of Nebraska - Lincoln