SUPERINTENDENTS’ PERSPECTIVES OF THEIR RELATIONSHIPS WITH THEIR PRINCIPALS AS THEY IMPLEMENT THE “A PLUS REFORM ACT OF 2000” IN TWO MID-SIZE SCHOOL DISTRICTS IN GEORGIA

(Under the Direction of DR. SALLY J. ZEPEDA)

ABSTRACT

The relationship between superintendents and their principals is a topic of very little scholarly research. This is especially true when taking into account the pressures of accountability throughout America’s public schools. The purpose of this study was to examine the perspectives of two superintendents from mid-sized counties in Georgia as they worked with site-level principals in light of the legislation mandated through the Georgia A Plus Reform Act of 2000.

Data for this qualitative case study were collected through a series of interviews with the two selected superintendents during the 2001-2002 school year. The constant comparative method of data analysis was used. The two participants in this study described the impact of new Georgia reform laws on their relationships with their principals.

The research revealed four perspectives: 1) One primary function of the superintendent is to be a communicator, 2) High expectations set by the superintendent provide the mechanism for formal and informal evaluation of principals, 3) Regardless of state mandated reform, relationships between the superintendent and their principals are neither made nor broken as a result of legislated mandates, and 4) Central Office administrators play a key role in implementing the A Plus Reform Act of 2000.

This study described the participants’ methods for communicating expectations to their principals as well as their process for formal as well as informal evaluations. Relationships between themselves and their principals were discussed. Effective and clear communication was the guiding theme of this study. Communication was found to be the greatest component in building relationships between the superintendents and their principals.

INDEX WORDS: Superintendent, Reform, Communication and superintendents, Superintendent and principal relationships, Accountability, Principal evaluation, A Plus Reform Act of 2000.
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DEDICATION

The journey leading to the doctorate began in my childhood with two loving parents, Marjorie Busbee and Eugene Busbee, who instilled the value of an education and a work ethic to finish everything I started. These lessons have guided me in everything I do in both my personal and professional life. My loving wife, Jennifer Busbee, encouraged me every step of the way while I was completing the requirements for this degree. For my three sons, Jeff, Daniel, and Grant, I hope in some small way that this accomplishment will help you learn the value of an education as you begin your own journeys into adulthood.

This dissertation is dedicated to the ones I love the most—my family—Jennifer, Jeff, Daniel, and Grant. Know that you are the center and backbone of my journey.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The state of Georgia entered into the national educational reform arena in 2000 when Governor Roy D. Barnes initiated legislation, which became known as the *A Plus Reform Act of 2000*. The Georgia General Assembly passed it into law on March 16, 2000. The legislation was intended to be a comprehensive education reform statute designed to increase student academic performance and to hold local schools accountable for student progress. This legislation was modeled after a combination of reform efforts from Texas, Florida, and North Carolina.

Governor Barnes began the reform of education in Georgia by creating the Education Reform Study Commission, and in his June 7th 1999 speech to the Commission he stated:

> Public education is our Achilles heel. Monies spent on all levels of education in Georgia are about ten billion dollars—twice the amount spent ten years ago. It is time to reject excuse-based education. (Barnes, 1999, p. 1)

In his January 13, 2000 address to the legislature, Governor Barnes stated:

> We are at the crossroads of history. The most important thing we can do for our economy is to start improving our schools right now. The new economy is not dollars and cents. It is knowledge and information. (Barnes, 2000, p. 2)

The purpose of this study was to examine the perspectives of two superintendents from mid-size counties in Georgia as they work with site level principals in light of the legislation mandated through the Georgia *A Plus Reform Act of 2000*. The researcher sought to understand the relationship between superintendents and principals, given the
mandates of the *A Plus Reform Act* and the pressure for accountability. More specifically, the researcher was interested in only the superintendents’ perspectives on their working relationships with principals. The duration of the study spanned one school year. The knowledge discovered through such a study might assist superintendents, their school systems, and others interested in understanding the complexities and issues affecting the relationships between superintendents and site level principals.

**Statement of the Problem**

How does the *A Plus Reform Act of 2000* affect the relationship between superintendents and their principals? Does district accountability to the state affect the ways that superintendents communicate and interact with principals? These questions are the foundation for this case study.

Historically, states have enacted legislation related to educational requirements, funding, teacher qualifications, and graduation standards, and latitude was given to the local school systems to determine curriculum and programs. Latitude at the district and site level might, however, be shrinking as a result of legislation enacting precise measures of standards (Bracey, 2001; Rotberg, 2001).

In the 1980s an excellence movement swept America. The publication of *A Nation at Risk* in April 1983 initiated the furor that has led to numerous reform initiatives and to increased accountability movements in public education. One statement describing the demise of public education was forwarded by then United States Secretary of Education, Terrell H. Bell (1993):

>If an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we would have viewed it as an act of war. (p. 593)
The states responded with a flurry of legislative action. Legislators issued directives, demanded accountability, and made changes in state educational policy. As history has shown, the top-down initiatives of the states failed to produce results, and schools were slow to increase student achievement as defined by standardized test results, lower dropout rates, and to produce other desired outcomes that were mandated by standards imposed by external constituents (Conley & Goldman, 1995; Rotberg, 2001). According to Barnes (2000), Georgia has consistently ranked near the bottom of all states in public education based on student performance tests. Regardless of the dollars spent on instruction, significant pay raises for teachers, and even as a result of the 1980s reform package—The Quality Basic Education Act (QBE)—increased student performance results on standardized tests continues to lag behind.

Who ultimately implements school reform? In Georgia, the legislators enact reform laws, and the State Board of Education creates rules based on these laws. The State Department of Education provides curriculum, tests, and interventions. The Office of Accountability provides a check on the work of all the educational institutions that are held accountable by the A Plus Reform Act of 2000. Responsibility for implementing the provisions of statutes lies with the local school district superintendent. It is at the local level where all the above are interwoven into an action plan. Much of the responsibility for success or failure of school reform vis-à-vis legislative mandates stops at the office of the superintendent, who according to Chalker (1992):

Is perhaps the most important player in the design for twenty-first century school administration. The power of the position supports a role change that embellishes the total educational governance system. From top to bottom, school governance must be refocused and redirected, and the superintendent must become the change agent. (p. 5)
Given the elevated role of the superintendent in change (Chalker, 1992), and the press for accountability at all levels of the organization (Rotberg, 2001), examining the perspectives of superintendents and their work with site-level principals appears to be a worthy area to examine.

Framework of the Study

One of the key components of the *A Plus Reform Act of 2000* is the creation of the Office of Accountability. This office issues state, district, and individual school report cards each year to report the effectiveness of school districts in providing a quality education for its students. Schools with high grades will receive monetary rewards; schools with consistently failing grades will be penalized.

This accountability system, while trying to ensure that all students receive a quality education, places tremendous stress on superintendents and principals. Pressures to perform at a higher level are placed on the superintendent, who in turn must place pressure on the principal. Eventually, the pressure finds its way to the classroom – the only place where gains in student achievement can occur (Fullan, 1991).

While Georgia’s reform effort focuses primarily on increased student achievement, there are other aspects of reform that could possibly change the traditional relationship between the superintendent and principal. These aspects include:

- The development of Local School Councils;
- The changes in state funding of programs;
- Reduced class size;
- Criterion-referenced tests and end of course testing;
- Changes in teacher certification;
- Abolishment of tenure; and,
- Teacher evaluations based on student achievement goals. (*A Plus Reform Act of 2000*)
These changes will more than likely affect the way leaders, both superintendents and principals, do business in the future. Implementing numerous changes, and implementing them immediately, causes stress and turmoil within school districts (Schlechty, 2001). Some mandates are ambiguous and interpretation can be viewed loosely. Other mandates are straightforward but require time for implementation. Transition of any type can be difficult. Massive change within a short timeline, while having major implications, can be an insurmountable task for superintendents as well as principals.

Substantive change is time consuming and energy depleting (Belasco, 1991; Calabrese, 1999; Fullan, 1991; Sarason, 1982). Fullan (1991) reported “for effective change to occur in a school system, the superintendent must have three to five years to implement change” (p. 19). Fullan concluded, “For major reform, he/she must have up to ten years” (p. 19). Implementing change is difficult and is exacerbated given the poor tenure rate of superintendents and board members. Principals usually have a longer tenure, and most believe they can outlast the current superintendent (Fullan, 1991). Change stresses the relationship between superintendents and principals. Potentially, the relationship between the superintendent and principals within a district can be strained due to the “push down” affect of mandated change.

The superintendent is often in the position of pushing down to building principals the changes that must be made to enact the provisions of externally-mandated change vis-a-vis legislation. Uncertainty and ambiguity are direct byproducts of change efforts. It is, however, imperative that for change to occur, the people within the organization must be willing and able to change (Fullan, 1991).
According to Fullan (1991), it is common for school systems to experience an “implementation dip” when beginning reform efforts. Productivity and morale decline due to tensions and anxieties generated as educators begin to deal with unanticipated problems. At the same time, political expectations for accountability and results can impede progress toward meeting the objective of change, and this is the paradox that Evans (1996) referred to as the “double-edged” nature of change.


Schlechty (1990) stated, “to change an organization’s structure … one must not only attend to rules, roles, and relationships, but also to systems of beliefs, values, and knowledge as well. Structural change requires cultural change” (p. 22). Razik and Swanson (2000) indicated that cultural change is the most difficult change to enact because, “A school’s culture is bound by shared values and beliefs that are the glue holding the organization together” (p. 128). For cultural change to occur, superintendents, boards of education, and principals need to develop a cohesive team of people who are committed to each other and who exhibit high levels of trust and mutual respect for the work of each other (Carter & Cunningham, 1997; Kowalski, 1999).

It has been repeatedly reiterated in the literature that it is human nature to resist change (Evans, 1996; Fullan, 1991; Sarason, 1982). According to Evans (1996), “We embrace change as well as resist it. We accept the inevitability of change yet we
naturally resist it, leaving us ambivalent when confronted with innovation” (p. 21). It would seem reasonable that resistance to change that is mandated, challenges the natural order of the work of the superintendent sand their relationships with both the local board of education and site-level administrators, especially the principals. Given this belief, this study sought to examine the perspectives of superintendents and their work and relationships with principals during the implementation of the provisions of the A Plus Reform Act of 2000.

According to Gerstner, Semerado, Doyle, and Johnson, (1992):

Leaders are especially critical to organizations that must adapt and change. Without a leader who can articulate a new mission, an organization will plow straight ahead, a creature of habit. Without a leader who can organize and motivate others to pursue a new strategy, an organization will follow its traditional modes of operation, or pursue the private agendas of its members or employees. Without leaders, organizations will do the same thing tomorrow that they did today. (p. 54)

Chance (1992) believed that if a key leader is opposed to change, then efforts for improvement will more than likely fail. Superintendents of today and of the future must be effective change agents for public education to move forward (Chance, 1992; Kowalski, 1999). Superintendents must embrace change, communicate the mission effectively to their principals, and take strategic steps to accomplish the goals set forth by legislative bodies. It would be fitting to say that: How goes the superintendent also goes the school system.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the perspectives of two school superintendents specifically relating to the relationships between building level principals and the superintendent in light of the A Plus Reform Act of 2000 legislation. The
researcher examined the perspective of two superintendents to understand how the legislation has affected the relationship between the superintendent and principals in this era of accountability explicated in the *A Plus Reform Act of 2000*.

**Research Questions**

The purpose of this study was to examine the perspectives of two school superintendents specifically relating to the relationships between building level principals and the superintendent in light of *A Plus Reform Act of 2000* legislation. How does this legislation affect the relationship between the superintendent and his/her principals? Does district accountability to the state affect the ways that superintendents communicate and interact with principals?

To answer these questions, it was necessary to examine the perspectives of school superintendents. The following research questions were considered:

1. What is the influence of the *A Plus Reform Act of 2000* on the superintendent’s work in the area of accountability for principals?

2. How do superintendents view their relationship with principals given the mandates that must now be implemented to comply with *A Plus Reform Act of 2000*?

3. What is the impact of the *A Plus Reform Act of 2000* on the superintendent’s work in the area of division of responsibilities?

**Significance of the Research**

It was the intent for the research to provide insight on the relationship between the superintendents and their principals during the era of accountability prescribed by the *A Plus Reform Act of 2000* and to provide insight on the changes that are occurring in the
roles and responsibilities between these positions. The insights and reflections of the participants might provide information and knowledge as practitioners work toward implementing state policy at the local level. Findings might also help future policy makers become aware of key components that will strengthen the educational process in Georgia as superintendent’s work with principals.

Assumptions of the Study

It is assumed that:

1. The superintendents were able to describe their work as influenced by the A
   Plus Reform Act of 2000 and its impact on principal accountability in their district.

2. Superintendents work directly with PK-12 principals while implementing legislatively mandated change.

Definitions of Terms

The following term is defined within the context of this study.

Mid-Sized School Districts: A school district that typically serves between 15,000 to 30,000 students.

Limitations of the Study

Limitations of this study included:

1. The background research data and literature on the topic was limited. The A
   Plus Reform Act of 2000 was only one year into implementation at the time of this study.
The data were gathered from superintendents from two mid-sized school districts within one state. Generalizations may or may not apply to other school districts within or outside the state.

Overview of Research Procedures

A qualitative case study approach was chosen to provide the most effective means for describing the perspectives of two superintendents’ relationships with building level principals as the *A Plus Reform Act of 2000* was being implemented.

The researcher:

1. interviewed the two superintendents three times during this study;
   collected and analyzed artifacts directly related to the school system of each superintendent; and,

2. documented the interview process through fieldnotes.

Each interview was audio recorded and then later transcribed. Consistent themes from the data were coded. Fieldnotes assisted in illustrating the points made by the superintendents during interviews. Each participant was given the opportunity to examine all transcripts as well as to add clarification after the interview. Artifacts such as memos from the superintendents to principals were analyzed.

Organization of the Dissertation

Chapter 1 included the background and rationale for the present study, including the statement of its purpose, definition of terms and, an overview of the research method. Chapter 2 presented a review of the literature relevant to superintendents’ work or duties, and an examination of the change literature. Chapter 3 presented the data collection procedures and the methods used to analyze data collected at the subject sites. Chapter 4
reported the data and its analysis. Chapter 5 provided a discussion of the results, including implications for superintendents and principals regarding the challenges and issues during educational reform, as well as implications for further research.
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The purpose of this study was to examine the perspectives of two superintendents from mid-size counties in Georgia as they worked with site level principals in light of the legislation mandated through the Georgia *A Plus Reform Act of 2000*. This chapter examined the work of the superintendent, the superintendent’s job of implementing reform mandates, the superintendent’s role in change within a district, and communication patterns of superintendents.

The Work of the Superintendent

The quality of America’s schools depends to a large extent on the effectiveness of its school superintendents (Doyle, 1998; Kowalski, 1999; Leithwood, 1995; Murphy, 1993). It is the superintendent that assumes the role of chief educational leader and spokesperson of the school district. The superintendency demands a leader who is visionary, creative, bold, and has the capacity to initiate change (American Association of School Administrators, 1993; Carter & Cunningham, 1997). Doyle (1998) asserted that no longer can the superintendent act as “Autocrat in chief” because “successful organizations are no longer characterized by a command-control structure.” (p. 15). The American Association of School Administrators (1993) sent a strong message regarding the leadership of the superintendent:

Top-down bureaucratic management is being replaced by bottom-up executive leadership that encourages shared decision making among school staff, community, business, and other stakeholders. Superintendents must be skilled collaborators who can rally all available resources to support better education for all children living in our multicultural society. (p. 3)
The superintendent is the leader of the educational system and is normally considered the education expert or instructional leader of the larger school community (Carter & Cunningham, 1997; Norton, Webb, Dlugosh, & Sybouts, 1996). With the press for accountability, superintendents must emerge more than as mere Chief Executive Officers (CEO’s) of the school, and according to Doyle (1998), “the true superintendent is the CAO: Chief Academic Officer” (p. 16). Moreover, Doyle asserted:

In small districts, the superintendent’s performance is a solo act; in larger districts, the superintendent may – nay, must – delegate much of the functional responsibility in these areas. Come what may, the buck stops with the superintendent, and the most important part of the job description CAO. Neglect that, and the rest of the game is not worth the candle. (p. 16)

However, according to Leithwood (1995), “In the work of the superintendent, he/she is far removed from the classroom, [and] the functions of instructional leadership are carried out by others” (p. 2).  

Because of the structure of most central offices and the myriad complexities of the work required of superintendents, they are buffered from getting into schools and from having frequent contact with site-level administrators. There are, according to Doyle (1998), levels of central administrators or “middlemen” that carry out the work of superintendents, and in large, urban school systems, Kowalski’s (1995) research suggested that urban superintendents “devote more time on management and political activity” (p. 95) than on overseeing the academic program of the district. Further, urban superintendents reported being “forced to spend a great deal of their time with officials from outside of their organizations,” and they “usually must spend a great deal of time with deputies, associates, and assistants (Kowalski, 1995, p. 96) who communicate more directly with site-level administrators.
The job of superintendent is the most complex and most controversial in a school district, and Carter and Cunningham (1997) stated that:

Today, school superintendents must be well grounded: from solid pedagogy to financial management, from child growth and development to political acumen, and from organizational and group behavior to staff development and student personnel. The superintendent must be knowledgeable in matters of instructional options, applications of the most promising research, assessment and evaluation; and allocation of human, financial and material resources. Before the superintendent can apply any of this knowledge, he or she must first learn to survive in a very difficult, highly politicized, conflictive job. (p. 3)

Similarly, Norton et al. (1996) reported that the superintendent is:

Often the target of criticism and at the center of controversy, forced to become the defender of policy and the implementer of state and federal mandates, and the orchestrator of diverse interests seeking to influence the schools. Conflicts with the school board are common, as are the financial pressures under which superintendents operate. Superintendents in the 1980’s and 1990’s have faced the challenges brought on by reform movement. Many of the proposals that have grown out of this movement (e.g., site-based management, teacher empowerment, and parental choice) have brought additional challenges to the superintendent’s authority and leadership. (p. 21)

Regardless of the staggering number of day-to-day tasks in the work of the superintendent, the underlying and primary responsibility of the superintendent is to establish a vision for the educational organization and then to convert this vision into a set of goals and priorities for the organization (Konner & Augenstein, 1990).

Kowalski (1999) noted that many vacancy notices for superintendents commonly include the need for a visionary leader. Boards of education seek superintendents who possess a vision for the future, and ideas for school restructuring. School boards are looking for leaders who are bold, imaginative, and who are risk-takers (Norton et al., 1996).
In most communities, school boards are under pressure to implement change. Business leaders as well as parents are demanding leaders who will increase student achievement, decrease dropout rates, and meet the needs of the growing special interest groups (American Association of School Administrators, 1993). The demands of the superintendency have led to short tenure for superintendents whose time in the position, according to Kowalski was, in 1995, approximately “two and a half years” in urban settings (1999, p. 107). Communities look for a person who can move the organization forward united toward a goal (Carter & Cunningham, 1997). Successful superintendents according to Carter and Cunningham (1997) are able to “communicate a clear, shared vision and have the ability to inspire others to work toward realizing that vision” (pp. 3-4).

A visionary superintendent unifies the school system by creating a shared vision for the district. Kowalski (1999) indicated that for the superintendent the vision is critical because “a school district’s vision represents consensus about the future [and the vision] provides the basis for planning.” (p. 214). Specific outcomes are identified and purposeful direction is created in order to move individuals, groups, and resources toward the identified goals. An effective superintendent, who is visionary, creates a plan rather than just idly dreaming (Kowalski, 1999). The superintendent creates the vision and works the plan to effectively include the shared values and beliefs of all stakeholders.

Each superintendency is somewhat different, depending on factors unique to the community. Factors such as the size of the system, locality (urban, suburban, or rural), as well as the identified culture and values of the community of which the superintendent works have direct implications on the work and role of the superintendent. The work of
the superintendent is situated within the context of the district. Regardless of the size of
the school district or the makeup of the district, most job descriptions for superintendents
are similar, including a wide array of managerial duties, instructional leadership duties,
and analytical tasks. Specific job descriptions for superintendents at the local district
level are often unspecific (Norton et al., 1996). Typically, job descriptions contain
sweeping statements of responsibility, conveying the message that the superintendent is
responsible for all phases of the school district’s operation; however, according to
Kowalski (1999), “These documents also fail to provide detailed information about the
real work lives of superintendents” (p. 11).

Kowalski (1999) believed that enrollment and complexity of a school district are
often key factors in determining what superintendents actually do on a daily basis. Large
districts often seek superintendents who are specialists and who can concentrate on a few
key interests that are specified by the local board of education. In districts with a tightly
focused job description for the superintendent, most other duties are delegated to
subordinates (Carter & Cunningham, 1997; Kowalski, 1999). In contrast,
superintendents in smaller districts have a much more general job description, and these
superintendents are more involved in all areas of administration – including the direct
supervision of principals (Moore, 2001). The nature and measures of accountability
might alter the working relationships between superintendents and principals. Sharp and
Walter (1997) reported that a superintendent:

80 percent of their time talking with others, dealing with technical information,
legal rules, and regulations, past activities of the district, preferences of different
people, and possible consequences for different decisions. The activities are
largely deskwork, phone calls and meetings. They regret not being closer to the
classroom. (p. 47)
According to Chand (1987), all school districts have commonalities. Regardless of the obvious differences in the work of superintendents in large districts versus smaller districts, school boards generally want a superintendent who has expertise in: 1) curriculum, 2) finance, and 3) public relations (Chand, 1987; Sharp & Walter, 1997). Hoyle (1993, cited in the American Association of School Administrators (AASA)) indicated:

Superintendents of large school districts compare their jobs to those held by CEOs in the private sector. CEOs and large district superintendents deal with the issues of large budgets, personnel, product accountability, and competition. However, of the 13,800 superintendents in the United States, two-thirds work in small districts of fewer than 3,000 students. (p. 3)

The Commission on Standards for the Superintendency and its chairman John Hoyle (1993, cited in AASA) crafted the Eight Standards for the Superintendent, which served as the framework for the role of most superintendents. These standards identify competencies and skills, which were grounded in extensive research, collaboration with superintendents, and professors of educational administration. Given the nature of the current study, four of the eight standards appear to be applicable in the role and responsibilities of the superintendent developing:

1. Leadership and district culture;
2. Policy;
3. Communication and community relations; and,
4. Organizational management.

The day-to-day work of the superintendent can be divided into three main areas, which include work with the board of education, the school system, and the community, according to Allison (1998). Each of these areas represents a different but reciprocal arena with a distinct set of obligations and objectives for the superintendent to meet.
Norton et al. (1996) indicated, “since the day that the office of superintendent was created until present, there has been a strained relationship between the board that makes policy and the superintendent that carries it out” (p. 34). Increased tensions directly affect the work of the superintendent as well as his/her relations with the board of education. Demands from the district to solve almost unsolvable problems, reform movements, and external mandates intensify the built-in tension between the superintendent and the board of education (Norton et al., 1996). Much of the dissention between the board of education and the superintendent is situated in questioning of authority regarding who makes decisions – the board, the superintendent, or both (Sharp & Walter, 1997).

Sharp and Walter identified five possible decision making agreements that superintendents and boards should make to avoid conflict. The range of decision making entrusted to the superintendent follows a continuum that ranges from complete control to no control by the superintendent. According to Sharp and Walter (1997), the decision-making continuum follows with:

1. The superintendent has complete authority to act, within board policy.
2. The superintendent has complete authority to act, but must inform the board of the action.
3. The superintendent has authority to act only with prior approval from the board.
4. The superintendent may be asked for recommendations, but the decision is up to the board.
5. The superintendent does not participate in the decision. (pp. 90-91)

A good working relationship between the board of education and its superintendent is essential to the productive operation of a school district. Norton et al., (1996) reiterated, “This relationship does more to determine the quality of education in a school district than any other single factor” (p. 34).
Superintendents in Light of Reform Legislation

America’s focus on the scrutiny of public education in the United States began with the 1983 publication of *A Nation At Risk*. According to Bell (1993), the strong, negative language of that report electrified the American public and educational policy within states instantly began to change.

Ronald Reagan was president during *A Nation At Risk*. George Bush followed as president with the title of “The Education President.” Bill Clinton followed promising that education would become a high-priority national concern. George W. Bush won the presidency in 2001 primarily on his reputation as the “Education Governor of Texas.” All of these presidents have promised reform and improvements in education in America. Almost twenty years after the first reform movement, we still struggle to find the right answer to the education problems in America.

Today, much of the attention of school reformers is focused on accountability, test scores, and standards (Houston, 2001). States are prescribing state-approved curriculum, creating acceptable achievement benchmarks, identifying who will be held responsible, and providing rewards for success as well as sanctions for failure. As a result, superintendents are being forced to operate differently than in the past, and they can no longer afford to operate isolated from the building level administrator (Carter & Cunningham, 1997; Johnson & Verre, 1994). Ashbaugh and Kasten (1992) referred to accountability as the belief that schools should answer to the public for the academic achievement of their students.

The highly structured organization of the past, which has not been capable of rapid adjustment to new needs, must change or face the consequences of lagging behind.
those systems that can change (Conner, 1992; Evans, 1996). In light of the flurry of reform efforts, superintendents must shoulder the responsibility of answering the call for school improvement. Those who enact legislation believe that a strong superintendent can “be a champion of reform, assess a district’s needs, devise solutions to its problems, take charge of its policies and practices, provide support to innovative principals, inspire confidence among teachers, and ensure compliance of the reluctant and recalcitrant” (Johnson & Verre, 1994, p. 1). Hayes (2001) summarized:

As schools become more increasingly accountable to the public, the survival of superintendents depends more and more on their ability to raise the academic achievement of students. Publication of report cards for schools that compare test scores with other schools is now common. The test data appears in local newspapers; as a result, citizens have an opportunity to compare their students’ test scores with other schools. A superintendent whose students continue to do poorly becomes like a baseball manager who has a losing record. Although many complex factors contribute to the low test scores, if there is not improvement, the superintendent will eventually be held accountable. Superintendents in the past never had to worry about this type of pressure. (p. 6)

Public education is no longer stable or predictable (Fullan, 1991; Sarason, 1990). Educational issues such as the purposes of education are hotly contested throughout the country as well as from school to school. Johnson and Verre (1994) asserted that, “some contend that public education should serve the interests of business and industry while others argue that schools should focus on the diversity of students” (p. 272). Public education has a wide-range of stakeholders with conflicting interests. With so many divergent points-of-view of what schools should be, it is no wonder that schools cannot agree on what is most important and focus attention and resources on attaining goals.

Across the nation, America is currently in, “The New Accountability Era” with school district performance being evaluated school by school. The performance of all schools individually is driving the evaluation of school district performance. Lashway,
(1999) identified seven dimensions of evaluation that states assess achievement and
growth in school systems. The seven evaluation dimensions included:

- District/school approval based on student performance rather than compliance
to regulations;
- A focus on schools as a unit for improvement rather than district-level;
- Continuous school improvement strategies based on specific performance
targets;
- Discussion of peer practice rather than evaluation by the central office;
- School grades based upon a continuum;
- Public reporting of school-level test scores, attendance, and drop-out rates;
and,
- Consequences attached to performance levels for schools. (p. 21)

The role of the superintendent must change to meet the demands of
accountability. Lashway’s seven points directly relate to the site level and as such, it
would appear logical to forward that it is essential for superintendents to be able to work
effectively with their building-level principals. According to Hayes (2001), “of all the
tasks performed by the superintendent of schools, selecting and working with building
principals may be among the most important” (p. 74). Yet, during a search on the
research on the working relationships between superintendents and site-level
administrators (e.g., specifically the principal) empirical studies could not be found.

Research on the superintendent has followed distinct paths with the most notable
patterns including: the preparation of superintendents (Glass, et al, 2000); the conflict
between the board of education and the superintendent (Carter & Cunningham, 1997;
Glass, et al 2000); the work of urban superintendents (Cuban, 1988; Kowalski, 1995;
1999); and, a variety of “other” aspects of the role of the superintendent. Given the
paucity of empirical research on the relationship between the superintendent and site-
level building administrators, a study such as this one can, perhaps, add to the literature.
Research on the superintendency is scant and according to Kowalski (1999), research is scarce in general due to the “multiple contextual variables” of the districts in which superintendents serve (p. 89). Hoyle (1993, cited in AASA) asserted that the role of the superintendent was the least thoroughly researched area in educational administration. Likewise, Murphy and Hallinger (1986) observed that “the research on the superintendency is remarkably thin, while research on the leadership role of the superintendent is sparser still” (p. 76). Crowson and Morris (1990) concluded, “There has been surprisingly little inquiry into how superintendents handle the internal organization and affairs of their schools” (p. 21).

After searching for empirical studies on the relationship between the superintendent and site-level administrators (e.g., the principal) and finding none, a search for studies detailing the work between superintendents and principals during the implementation of reform was conducted. No research results were found, even in such journals as Educational Administration Quarterly, the premiere research journal in the field of educational administration. The researcher then turned to the practitioner journals and organizations (e.g., NASSP, School Business Affairs) and found scant literature detailing the working relationships between the superintendent and the site-level principal. Several textbooks used in the preparation courses for the superintendency were then consulted. Here, too, these sources of information regarding the relationship between the superintendent and the principal yielded little information. Figure 2.1 details the books consulted and the amount of coverage on the relationships between the superintendent and the principal.
Figure 2.1 Coverage of the Superintendent and the Relationship Between Site-level Principals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Textbook Title</th>
<th>Author &amp; Date</th>
<th>Coverage and Content</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>So you want to be a superintendent</td>
<td>Hayes (2001)</td>
<td>2 pages: Strategies for getting to know the principal; remediation of poor principal performance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case studies of the superintendency</td>
<td>Short &amp; Scribner (2000) (Eds.)</td>
<td>0 pages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The study of the American school superintendent</td>
<td>Glass, Bjork, &amp; Brunner (2000) (Ed.)</td>
<td>0 pages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The school superintendent: Theory, practice, and cases</td>
<td>Kowalski (1999)</td>
<td>0 pages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The superintendent of the future: Strategies and action for achieving academic excellence</td>
<td>Spillane &amp; Regnier (1998)</td>
<td>1 page: Enlisting principals in promoting positive public relations.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 2.1, continued. Coverage of the Superintendent and the Relationship Between Site-level Principals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Textbook Title</th>
<th>Author &amp; Date</th>
<th>Coverage and Content</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The American school superintendent: Leading in an age of pressure</td>
<td>Carter &amp; Cunningham (1997)</td>
<td>0 pages</td>
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<tr>
<td>The school superintendency: Leading education into the 21&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt; Century</td>
<td>Konnert &amp; Augenstein (1990)</td>
<td>0 pages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keepers of the flame: Contemporary urban superintendents</td>
<td>Kowalski (1995)</td>
<td>0 pages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effective school district leadership: Transforming politics into education</td>
<td>Leithwood (1995) (Ed.)</td>
<td>9 pages: Principal evaluation and removal; communicating the district vision.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Given the provisions of A Plus and in reviewing Lashway’s (1999) recommendations for state’s to evaluate a district, and by default, the success of a superintendent, it is worthy to examine the relationship between superintendents and their principals. To this end, the superintendent must be mindful that only teachers can produce results with children, and that it is the principal who works directly with the teachers on a day-to-day basis. Georgia is certainly no exception to this rule. Lashway’s seven dimensions hold true for Georgia’s 180 school superintendents who must be mindful of the Georgia A Plus Reform Act of 2000, which was passed by the Georgia Legislature in March 2000. The purpose of this legislation was to increase student academic performance and to hold local schools more accountable for student progress.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Textbook Title</th>
<th>Author &amp; Date</th>
<th>Coverage and Content</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New superintendents and school reform</td>
<td>Johnson &amp; Verre (1994)</td>
<td>0 pages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding school system administration: Studies of the contemporary chief education officer</td>
<td>Leithwood &amp; Musella (1991) (Eds.)</td>
<td>0 pages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban school chiefs under fire</td>
<td>Cuban (1976)</td>
<td>0 pages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Books = 13</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Total Pages = 12</strong></td>
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Key components of the *A Plus Reform Act of 2000*, which impact school superintendents as related to this specific study included:

- The creation of the Office of Accountability whose role is to develop education accountability systems, audits, and inspect educational agencies at all levels. This office creates and implements a statewide k-12 accountability assessment program that is performance based. The office will establish individual school ratings of A, B, C, D, or F in the areas of absolute student achievement as well as progress toward achievement. Grades of F will result in public hearings, ordering a student improvement plan, or a school improvement team from the state. A grade of F for two years will result in the state appointing a schoolmaster or improvement team to oversee the school. Three consecutive years of an F grade could result in removing the school personnel and reconstituting the school.

- School councils will be created. These councils are to be in place in each public school by October 1, 2003. These seven member councils will be composed of the principal, two teachers, two parents, and two business partners. Their role is to provide advice and make recommendations. Their decisions will be brought before the local board of education.

- Annual teacher evaluations will directly reflect the teacher’s role in increasing student performance of students assigned to that teacher. A teacher will not receive credit for any year of service on the state pay scale for any year that the teacher receives an unsatisfactory evaluation. (*A Plus Reform Act of 2000*)

Given the legislation of the *A Plus Reform Act of 2000*, Georgia superintendents are quickly realizing that accountability is trickling up rather than down. Accountability for results now rests with principals of buildings. This will move up to the level of the superintendent. This study sought to uncover the relationships between superintendents and their principals in light of accountability.

**The Superintendent’s Role in Change Within a District**

Johnson (1996) believed superintendents facing reform movements in the twenty-first century need to be shrewd, well-informed, visionary, and take charge leaders who instinctively know what schools need and then be able to work with troubled school
systems prepared to fix them. As Cuban (1988) observed, “one only has to read the brochures sent out by school boards advertising superintendent vacancies that only heroes need apply” (p. 47).

Superintendents must be change agents. Superintendents must be leaders who persuade teachers, administrators, parents, and the community to join them in improving schools. These leaders clarify problems, create order, inspire confidence, and make things right. All of this must be accomplished, while at the same time, cleverly empowering others (Johnson, 1996). The positional power of the superintendent is not enough alone to make change occur. Sergiovanni (1990) referred to the former positional power as “follow me” leadership, and “This type of leadership often gets people to cooperate but cannot inspire the kind of commitment that will make schools work well, because it tends to induce a state of subordination” (p. 31). Johnson (1996) stated:

Superintendents engaging change in a school district are dependant upon teachers, principals, and others in schools. Faithful compliance with carefully laid plans of vision is not enough to effect complex changes in schooling. A superintendent cannot simply issue new instructions, sponsor a training session and expect principals and teachers to make reform work. Implementation of reforms takes time, shared understanding, and earnest cooperation. (p. 120)

Enochs (1981) referred to a type of leadership that effectively enacts change as transformational leadership. Transformational leadership builds mutual commitment and interdependence among members of the organization. Relationships are guided by ideas and values. Because of the interdependence between people, people act selflessly to promote shared accomplishment. Common values and shared goals for the good of all become the norm. Superintendents successful in this method of change are able to gain commitments for improvements rather than for the mere maintenance of the system. (Enochs, 1981)
Johnson (1996) addressed the natural resistance to change in public schools and stated:

Schools are conservative in culture and it is far easier for principals and teachers to repeat what they have always done than to venture into an unknown. However, leadership is about change and the job of the superintendent is to promote change for the good of the district. Change though is hard to achieve. Certainly some teachers’ and principals’ negative reactions to reform and change are warranted – many innovations are flashy and foolish, and some are wrongheaded and disruptive. Given public education’s failure to meet the needs of today’s students, however, teachers and principals cannot simply continue to do the same things in the same ways. Recognizing this, superintendents must initiate programs to promote improvement. For success to follow, these innovations must be introduced as a genuinely collaborative process. (p. 146)

In light of the recent reform, most concerns about public education have focused specifically on the need for school improvement efforts at the individual school site. Less attention has been paid to changes within the central office. Barr and Dreeben (1983) stated, “education would be a strange organization, if the parts were hermetically sealed off from each other, if superintendents had no impact upon principals” (p. 3). Pfeffer (1984) in Musella (1995) noted, “leadership effects may vary with level in an organizational hierarchy, but for the most part, leadership research has been over concentrated upon first line supervisors” (p. 223). Pfeffer argued, “if leadership has any impact, it should be evident at higher levels or where there is more discretion in decisions and activities” (p. 224). Coleman and LaRocque (1990) reported, “through superintendents reaching out, they were able to foster a positive district ethos, an ethos that supported district improvement and school effectiveness” (p. 84). They also found that “by comparison, low performing districts and their superintendents seemed passive; they felt the important work and decisions were in others’ hands” (p. 84).
School Culture, Change, and the Role of the Superintendent

The culture of the school organization has a direct relationship on the efforts of change. There is support for the belief that understanding culture is extremely important in assisting to understand organizational behavior; this in turn, can assist in shaping the beliefs and actions of those in or who are affected by change in the organization (Buono & Bowditch, 1989; Deal & Kennedy, 1982; Huse & Cummings, 1985; Morgan, 1986; Musella & Davis, 1991; Patten, 1988). According to Schein (1990), “culture is created through two means: critical organizational incidents and identification with leaders; through leaders modeling, group members identify with leaders and internalize their values and assumptions, thus affecting cultural change” (p.115).

The superintendent, as CEO, significantly influences organizational change in public schools. Musella (1995) stated, “there is growing support for the position that the chief education officer in school systems must provide the type of leadership necessary to change culture in ways that lead to greater organizational effectiveness” (p. 227). Earlier, Coleman and LaRocque (1990) asserted:

The current research leads us to expect district leadership in high performing districts to involve creating and sustaining a positive district ethos, which indirectly affects principals, and through them teachers, students, and parents. This is achieved through reaching out, which includes both vision (norms which shape and guide the activities towards a desired future state) and range (the scope and variety of activities and issues to which the superintendent devotes his time and energy). (p. 67)

Superintendents must deliberately set out to change the culture of the district as a means to improve organizational effectiveness. Bolman and Deal (1991) indicated, “In reframing the organization, leadership is the art of good judgment, the art of choosing the right frame to fit a particular organizational situation” (p. 242). They further stated,
“Such reframing is integral to the process of changing organizational culture” (p. 242).

Schlechty (1990) in Carter and Cunningham (1997) stated:

It is impossible to legislate excellence. Regulations cannot substitute nor create the vision, shared values, personal commitment, and culture that make up the soul of an excellent school district. When individuals work in isolation, without shared purpose or common vision of the ideal school, the schools in the district do not improve. It is the relationship between the district and the schools that sustain the efforts of change in the individual schools. The superintendent and central office can help coordinate these activities. (p. 190)

Carter and Cunningham (1997) epitomized change as a key ingredient for future success of public schools, and they believed:

The fate of public education depends on the superintendent’s ability to anticipate and envision a totally new system of education. In this new paradigm, superintendents are leaders with creative insight into the new millennium; they are prepared to invent new school systems. But significant improvement in school performance will not occur unless superintendents assume strong, passionate leadership in instruction. The complexity of the reform efforts requires superintendents to focus the district’s time and resources on school improvement. Superintendents must possess and project a clear sense of priorities and strong advocacy for high expectations for all students. (p. 192)

Change must be the focus of superintendents in light of the reform issues and mandates handed down by states; moreover, superintendents can use reform issues as a positive opportunity for innovation and self-renewal of the school district. According to Cunningham and Gresso (1993), “When viewed as obstacles or mandates, these approaches to change create a group dynamic of defensiveness, power struggle, mistrust, and a sense of inadequacy” (p. 199).

Education in America is currently experiencing a paradigm shift. We are experiencing a change to a new set of rules and different boundaries. A number of educational fads have come and gone; however, the urgency for reform will not disappear. Superintendents must be up to the challenge in this new arena if schools are to
be successful in educating its children who the public entrusts them. We look to forward thinking superintendents to shape the collective vision of our school communities and initiate a plan for its implementation. We look to this person to work closely with its stakeholders; and the public expects superintendents to be agents of change who will provide the leadership to face the challenges of the office. It will be the school superintendent who will, in large part, determine the future fate of public education in America—one system at a time.

**Communication and the Constituency Relationships of the Superintendent**

History has proven that great leaders of the past have all been considered great communicators. This is no exception in the role of superintendent. According to Kowalski (1999), “the importance of this aspect is heightened by societal changes that place a premium on the timely exchange of information” (p. 282), and “today, superintendents must be knowledgeable about the nature of communication and proficient in using it” according to Hoy and Miskel, (1996, p. 341). Holliday (1996) described educational communication by stating:

Educational communication has two components. The first is the political aspect. This deals with laying the groundwork for staffing, facility, and programming needs so that the public will adequately fund schools. The second is the rational aspect. This deals with interrelationships of educators, students, parents, and others in the community. In this area, partnerships and parent-volunteer contributions exemplify enhancements that can make a school outstanding. Both components – the political and the rational – though different in purpose call for similar attitudes and skills on the part of administrators. School leaders must be able to build consensus among staff and the citizenry with regard to relevancy goals and approaches to achieving them. They must value sharing, asking, and discussing more than telling. (p. 4)

Educators have always thought that the nobility of their mission should result in guarantees of public support. Matthews (1996) presented information concerning the
erosion of the historical compact between the public and education and how educators still believe and operate in past perspectives of communication. He stated:

One reason for the failure of reform efforts is the approach taken by many educators. This approach to reform seems to take for granted that the long-standing commitment to public schools is still intact; that the contract remains in force and needs only to be invoked; that schools have merely to demonstrate legitimate needs in order for citizens to respond with financial support. It is assumed that the public can be rallied through the standard means of publicity and marketing: The buyers are out there waiting to be told the benefits of the product. Any trouble between school officials and the public is simply a failure to communicate. (p. 17)

Personal communication is an essential tool of a superintendent, and Lendell (1996) reported in his research that:

School district leaders spend 30% of their time communicating with supporters, 65% with critics, and only 5% with the 70% of the community that everyone talks about trying to reach. Superintendents should prioritize and allocate their personal communication effectively. (p. 9)

A superintendent’s worst enemy is the public’s lack of information. The press must become an indispensable part of the superintendent’s action plan. Most people who are neither parents nor teachers learn about schools from the media. Spillane and Regnier (1998) asserted that:

The more remote an individual’s personal connection to schools, the more likely that his or her impressions will come from news coverage of such issues as: “Superintendent Wants Tax Increase,” “School Board Splits on Sex Education,” or “Test Scores Fall.” (p. 227)

Superintendents must balance this type of communication with a constant and proactive flow of information to the public through the media. Carter and Cunningham (1997) expressed the need for superintendents to communicate effectively, and shared:

The superintendent’s ability to communicate effectively with all groups – within the community and within the school system – helps to clarify issues, ease concerns, and articulate expectations. He or she must be able to remain student-
focused and build coalitions among parents, school staff, central office staff, and community members. (p. 154)

Superintendents must be seen and heard, and they need to be visible in the community.

Norton et al. (1996) stated:

The superintendent has the opportunity from the very first day on the job to embrace the community with his/her message. The superintendent will have the opportunity to make impressions by speaking at civic and service clubs. He/she will become regular speakers. This is an excellent opportunity to form linkages with the community, ask questions and obtain community perceptions. This also provides the superintendent with a forum to explain current and future conditions necessary to support a sound educational system. Effective communication also depends on effective listening. He/she should listen, observe, and look for common themes that arise from various community groups. (p. 338)

The Superintendent and the Board of Education

The board of education’s role is to make policy for the school district. A superintendent spends a great deal of time with the board of education. The superintendent meets with the board of education as a group as well as individually, and the superintendent must keep the board informed about activities in the school district.

The members of the board of education are the elected voice of the public, and according to Hayes (2001):

Of all the relationships a superintendent will develop within the district, his/her work with the board of education will perhaps be the most challenging. The goal must be to develop a relationship that emphasizes the superintendent and board as a team. (p. 61)

Board members want to be kept informed. There are several methods including personal calls from the superintendent, written communication, and board meeting agendas.

Konnert and Augenstein (1990) asserted:

If something of significance in the school system occurs, board members want to hear about it from the superintendent first. In some instances, the superintendent calls each board member personally or the board chair contacts the other members.
A number of superintendents send a written communication to their board members each week, apprising them of recent and upcoming items of interest. Board agendas are a very important means of communicating to the board. The entire packet of agenda items and supporting items should be delivered to board members with enough time so they have adequate time to study and contact the superintendent if they have questions. (p.142)

Lack of communication between the superintendent and board of education can strain the relationship. McCurdy and Hymes (1992) identified four distinct destabilizers of superintendent-board relations, and most are directly related to communication:

- Board members often do not understand the differences between their roles and those of the superintendents.
- Poor communication by both parties contributes to conflict.
- Board members often enter office with personal agendas.
- Board members and superintendents often fail to establish a necessary level of mutual trust. (p. 48)

Relationships between board members and superintendents may deteriorate because they are not properly monitored. According to Castello, Creco, and McGowen (1992):

Superintendents should periodically engage the board of education in discussions designed to provide at least an informal evaluation of their relationship. This allows the superintendent to detect early warning signs of communication problems, as well as creates a forum for resolving conflicts that already exists. (p. 149)

**Superintendent Communication With External Agencies**

Education is not the self-contained service it once was, and school systems need to address the needs of varied student populations, the programs offered to them, and the personnel who monitor program effectiveness. As a result of varied student populations, superintendents often enter into symbiotic relationships with agencies outside the school district. According to Spillane and Regnier (1998), “superintendents must sit down and communicate with mayors, county executives, city councilmen, chambers of commerce,
Communities are made up of a variety of groups, and not all groups have children who are in school. Superintendents must reach out to these voters and taxpayers who will hopefully support the school system with tax dollars. Spillane and Regnier (1998) stated:

Superintendents must reach out to civic organizations, business and labor, ethnic organizations, service clubs, political organizations, churches, senior citizen organizations, and other places where the rest of the community can be reached. (p. 184)

When superintendents deal with outside agencies, politics can emerge due to vested interests. According to Johnson (1996), “politics is central to the work of today’s superintendents, who cannot succeed as educational leaders without also being active political leaders” (p. 153).

Communication with the different agencies of the community are political by nature, and Kowalski (1995) noted:

Competition for resources, demands for change, continuing uncertainty about the control of public education, and rival reform agendas are but some of the variables that generate intense conflict that can overpower the political skills of even the best-educated and most experienced superintendents. Survival often depends on one’s ability to align with the proper faction or maintain neutrality without alienating those possessing power within the community agencies. (p. 61)

Superintendent Communication With Internal Constituents

Superintendents traditionally have worked with central office administrators as the “middlemen” of district administration to school sites (Doyle, 1998). These associate superintendents, assistant superintendents, and program directors serve as the liaison or foot soldiers between the superintendent and building level administrators. As school districts undergo reform, the responsibilities of people in the central office, including the
work and relationship of the superintendent with others, are bound to change. According to Carter and Cunningham (1997), “reform movements which provide for more site based autonomy have forced central office administrators to move away from the role of regulator or initiator, and move forward as a service provider for schools” (p. 169). Carter and Cunningham also stated, “the role of the superintendent is changing to enabler/facilitator–which includes serving as the organizer and facilitator of information rather than the source of knowledge” (p. 172). This study sought to examine the relationship between the superintendent and site-level administrators during the implementation of Georgia House Bill 1187 – the A Plus Reform package.

Times are changing from when central office administrators controlled the authority as well as the purse strings to schools. (Gursky, 1992; Murphy, 1993) Hallett (1995) noted:

> Schools should be improved by decentralizing funds, authority, and accountability. Central office departments are entrepreneurial, competing with other venues to provide services. By existing only to serve school needs, departments will perform useful services to enhance schools. (p. 20)

**Monitoring as an Aspect of Communication and Accountability**

Superintendents assume ultimate responsibility for the success of the entire school district and as such, they should, at all times, know the strengths and weaknesses of personnel and programs within the district. The schools within the district are staffed by a variety of personnel who carry out the mission of the district through the adopted curriculum. The person at the site level with the easiest access to the superintendent is the principal. Thus, individuals that the superintendent should work closely with are the site-level administrators in the district. Hayes (2001) suggested:
That superintendents should especially develop good rapport with building principals, and superintendents should monitor the work of individual schools to ensure that principals:

- Articulate a clear school mission;
- Are visible in classrooms and hallways;
- Hold high expectations for teachers and students;
- Spend a major portion of their day working with teachers to improve instruction;
- Diagnose instructional problems; and,
- Create a positive school environment. (p. 73)

With the reform measures of the *A Plus Reform Act of 2000*, pressure is placed on the principal to show results for increases in student achievement. Performance at the building level determines the success not only of the principal but also of the superintendent as well. States as well as district superintendents are giving principals greater autonomy in decision-making that directly affects their schools. Results will be expected in return. Johnson (1996) reported:

> The principal, because he/she is in regular contact with teachers and students, has the most direct and profound influence on school practice. Yet in some districts, principals report to their superintendents through two or three administrative levels. Requests and recommendations move up the organization, responses and requirements move back down. Superintendents should supervise as well as evaluate principals directly, providing them with complete and accurate information about the superintendent’s priorities and expectations. (p. 265)

Superintendents should continually monitor principals’ job performance informally through observation, personal interaction, and indicators of satisfaction of teachers, parents, and students. It is, however, the formal evaluation by the superintendent that is the culminating factor in monitoring, accessing, and holding the principal accountable (Moore, 2001). Davis and Hensley (1999) shared the difficulty of this task by noting:
The task of evaluating a principal’s performance is much more difficult than that of evaluating a teacher. Evaluating teachers is based on a well-seasoned theoretical framework. Principal assessment must be based on activities, decisions and behaviors that are weighed against an ever-changing array of situational variables. (p. 22)

Davis and Hensley (1999) studied the evaluation process of 14 principals by six superintendents in Northern California. It was found through this qualitative study that:

1. Principal evaluations were anything but systematic or consistent;
2. In large districts, principals were generally evaluated by an assistant superintendent or director;
3. Feedback was not quantitative; and,
4. The principals did not see their evaluators regularly or frequently throughout the year.

This study strongly indicated that superintendent evaluations of principals are informal and distanced from direct contact, and evaluations of principals are based on indirect information (e.g., student performance on standardized test tests). Quantifiable data is not a cornerstone of principal evaluations (Davis & Hensley, 1999; Moore, 2001). Evaluations are political in nature rather than being based on performance objectives. With today’s focus on accountability and results-driven initiatives, this form of monitoring and accounting for the performance promises to continue to yield little insight on principal performance.

Chapter Summary

The purpose of this study was to examine the perspectives of two superintendents from mid-size counties in Georgia as they worked with site level principals in light of the legislation mandated through the Georgia A Plus Reform Act of 2000. This chapter examined the work of the superintendent, the superintendent’s job of implementing reform mandates, the superintendent’s role in change within a district, and communication patterns of superintendents.
Public education in America is currently undergoing a paradigm shift. No longer is the public willing to accept status quo. Reform mandates in every state are demanding measurable improvement in schools. The superintendency of today requires a different type of leader than in the past. The work of the superintendent has changed. Districts are evolving from top-down bureaucracies to bottom-up learning organizations.

Superintendents in this age of accountability and reform must be visionary and agents for change that can demonstrate immediate results within a school district. Academic achievement of students is becoming the defining feature of success. School systems are now being evaluated by the state on a school-by-school basis. Each school is being held accountable for the performance of all its students. Superintendents who have directed systems with a “one size fits all” mentality are moving school districts to school-level autonomy to address specific needs for school improvement.

Outside mandates for school reform are forcing school district superintendents to change the culture of thinking of the district. This forces superintendents to become facilitators of change. They must put the vision into an action plan as well as garner buy-in from administrators, teachers, and parents. The superintendent must provide the type of leadership that fosters organizational change.

The vehicle for change for superintendents in the reform arena is communication. Superintendents must be effective communicators of information about the district, and they must have superb communication skills with the board of education in order to ensure a highly productive team approach to the task of improving district performance. The superintendent must also effectively deal with many external groups in order to
foster system growth. The superintendent must nurture this group of taxpayers to promote harmony, productivity, and a cohesiveness of the school district

The work with key personnel within a school system is of paramount importance to a superintendent’s success. Reform has moved autonomy from the central level administrators to the building level principal. The superintendent must work closely with each principal in order for the district to move forward.

There is very little research on the relationship between the superintendent and principal. The superintendent monitors the work of the principal in informal ways. Formal evaluations of principals are mostly vague and inconsistent. As reform and accountability move from the teacher to the principal and finally to the superintendent, change toward quantitative evaluation of principals will begin to be more evident.

With the public demanding greater results from its’ schools, the superintendent’s job will become even more complex. School system leaders who are visionary, adaptable, who focus on results, and have the art of creating a culture for learning will be in great demand. In greater demand, however, will be superintendents who have the capacity to work effectively with the site-level principals within their districts. What is needed is a better understanding of the relationship between superintendents and principals in an era of school reform. The purpose of this study was to elicit the perspectives of superintendents regarding the work and relationships needed to work with principals in light of the A Plus Reform Act of 2000.
CHAPTER 3
RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine the perspectives of two superintendents from mid-size counties in Georgia as they worked with site level principals in light of the legislated mandates of the Georgia *A Plus Reform Act of 2000*. To accomplish this purpose, three interviews with two superintendents were conducted. The interviews were conducted at approximately six-week intervals throughout the 2001-2002 school year. The interviews were designed to seek data regarding the superintendents’ perspectives about their relationships with site level principals while implementing the mandates of the *A Plus Reform Act of 2000*. A qualitative case study approach using the constant comparative method of data analysis was used.

Chapter three included (a) an overview of the guiding research questions, (b) the design of the study, (c) the data sources, (d) data collection procedures, (e) data analysis methods, and (f) the limitations of the study.

Research Questions

This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What is the influence of the *A Plus Reform Act of 2000* on the superintendent’s work in the area of accountability for principals?

2. How do superintendents view their relationships with principals given the mandates that must now be implemented to comply with the A Plus Reform?
3. What is the impact of the *A Plus Reform Act of 2000* on the superintendent’s role in the area of division of responsibilities?

The Design

This study was qualitative in nature and sought to examine the participants’—two superintendents of mid-size school districts in Georgia—perspectives of their relationship with site level principals in light of the Georgia *A Plus Reform Act of 2000*. It was intended to examine the superintendents’ perspectives and not those of principals or other administrators.

Qualitative methods were chosen by the researcher in order to gain a real-life perspective of the superintendents and their experiences of working with site-level principals. Strauss and Corbin (1990) stated:

> The nature of the research problem determines whether the research should be qualitative or quantitative. Some areas of study naturally lend themselves to research that attempts to uncover the nature of people’s experiences. Qualitative research can be used to uncover and understand what lies behind any phenomenon about which little is known. Qualitative methods can give the intricate details of phenomena that are difficult to convey with quantitative methods. (p. 19)

Face to face interaction offered the purest form of information from the participants by their discussion and descriptions of their relationships with their principals. The researcher found that through this personal contact with the participants, they seemed more willing to openly provide details of their experiences. In this case study, the subjects were two superintendents from mid-size districts in Georgia.

Qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic look at the world of the participants (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Marshall & Rossman, 1989). In qualitative research, “The researcher studies things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (Becker, 1986).
In this study, the researcher interviewed the superintendents in their natural setting, their offices, to capture not only the superintendents’ words, but also to have a feel for the context of the districts in which they worked. Only by personal presence and interaction was the researcher afforded the opportunity to make these conclusions. Miles and Huberman (1994) stated:

Qualitative data are the source of well-grounded, rich descriptions and explanations of processes in identifiable local contexts. With qualitative data one can preserve chronological flow, see precisely which events led to consequences, and derive fruitful explanations. … Words, especially organized into incidents or stories, have a concrete, vivid, meaningful flavor that often proves far more to a reader—another researcher, policymaker, and a practitioner—than pages of summarized numbers. (p. 1)

A case study approach was selected in order to focus specifically on the relationships between two superintendents and their principals. This study focused on the what, why, and how of these relationships. Yin (1984) asserted, “A single case study can be vivid and illuminating, especially if they are chosen to be critical, extreme or unique, or revelatory” (p. 56). This study could be viewed in this light due to the fact that very little research could be found regarding the supervisory relationship between superintendents and their site-level principals during externally regulated change as found in the A Plus Act of 2000.

Case studies have six major conceptual responsibilities according to Denzin and Lincoln (2000), which included:

1. Bounding the case, conceptualizing the object of the study;
2. Selecting phenomena, themes, or issues;
3. Seeking patterns of data to develop the issues;
4. Triangulating key observations and bases for interpretations;
5. Selecting alternative interpretation to pursue; and,

6. Developing ascertations or generalizations about the case.

The researcher sought to examine the perspectives of two superintendents’ relationships with their principals in light of the Georgia *A Plus Reform Act of 2000*. The views of the superintendents were studied exclusively and the researcher acknowledges the importance of the perspectives of individual principals, however, the perspectives of the principals were out of the scope of this study, and the researcher chose to focus on the perspectives of superintendents due to the researcher’s own aspiration to the superintendency.

This study sought to examine the work of the superintendent as the person ultimately responsible for assuring the implementation of the mandates from the *A Plus Reform Act of 2000*. Furthermore, this study specifically sought to examine how superintendents’ implementation of the *A Plus Reform Act of 2000* affected the relationships between the superintendents and their building principals.

**Design Features of the Study**

Interviews were conducted at each of the two superintendent’s offices. Each interview began with unstructured questions with follow-up questions structured on the participant’s prior statements to questions. This allowed the researcher to probe the participants for depth as well as clarity. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2000), “unstructured, open-ended, in-depth interviews provide a greater breadth of data than any other type” (p. 652) of interview protocol. A total of three interviews were conducted. Unstructured interview questions (see appendix A) provided the opportunity to guide the participants eventually into more probing and specific questions.
The researcher notes, however, the difficulty involved in getting the superintendents to respond directly to questions in which specific information was asked. For example, after probing the superintendents on their method of communicating with principals, the researcher moved questioning to the relationships between the superintendents and their principals. A stonewall, an empty area, treading on eggshells? The two superintendents were adamant that their relationships were always strong. Answers were succinct and no elaboration was given. The superintendents would only discuss the strength of their relationships based on being in the district prior to ascending to the superintendency.

Data Collection

Data collection occurred from Fall 2001 to Spring 2002. Each interview was conducted approximately six weeks apart in order to provide the researcher the opportunity to transcribe audiotapes, code transcripts, and develop follow-up questions before each subsequent interview.

Selection of Participants

Superintendents Richard Pritchett of the Callaway School District and Thomas Hardy of the Alexander School District (superintendent names and district name are pseudonyms) were chosen for this study for several reasons. The researcher identified two superintendents whose entire tenure as a teacher and then as an administrator had occurred in the state of Georgia. The researcher wanted to study only superintendents who had experiences only in Georgia and had not been involved in previous reform efforts in other states. This allowed for comparison equality. In addition, each was a superintendent of the qualifying factor defined as a mid-sized school district. This
criterion was chosen due to the fact that all of the researcher’s experience had been in a mid-size school district and relating to each superintendent’s perspective would have more meaning to the researcher.

Geographical proximity to the researcher was also a factor in choosing the two participants. Both school districts in this study were easily accessible to the researcher. A two-hour travel parameter had been established. The researcher used the Georgia Department of Education Web page’s listing of district superintendents to cluster districts according to size and location. The list was further concentrated to districts that conformed to state comparison groups (districts with relatively the same size, demographics, and poverty rate). The researcher then filtered the districts by looking for superintendents who had been in Georgia during their entire career since teaching.

Through network sampling from participants in the Superintendents Professional Development Program (a state-wide training program of potential, future superintendents in the state of Georgia) as well as from district references, a list of five districts was narrowed to two districts and one alternative. The superintendents of the two selected school districts were contacted to determine their willingness to participate. Both Dr. Hardy and Dr. Pritchett readily agreed to participate in this study.

Given the case study approach, a small sample size was determined to be most effective to focus specifically on the data and the meanings derived from such a sample size. Miles and Huberman (1994) supported small sampling for case studies and stated, “You cannot study everyone everywhere doing everything. Your choices—whom you look at or talk with, about what and why—all place limits on the conclusion you can draw” (p. 27).
Procedures for Data Collection

Each superintendent was assured both the confidentiality of their names, as well as the identity of their districts, and pseudonyms were developed to ensure confidentiality. Each participant was asked to sign two Participant Consent Forms (See Appendix B). The consent form explained the conditions of voluntary participation, confidentiality, and contacts for questions about the research. The consent form also explained that the interviews would be audiotaped, transcribed, and kept in the secure possession of the researcher. Each participant’s work site served as the location for the interviews, and every attempt was made to conduct each interview at the same time of the day. The researcher found that this provided for consistency of the interview process. It also provided for a high level of comfort for the participants since each interview was held in their respective offices.

Data for this study were derived from interviews, fieldnotes, and artifacts. Specifically, data were collected through:

1. Three interviews of each superintendent

The researcher conducted three interviews of each superintendent. The researcher audio taped the interview as well as wrote fieldnotes. Interviews varied in length from sixty to ninety minutes. Immediately following each interview, all tapes were numbered and labeled for later comparison and transcription. All data were secured and accessible to only the researcher and the researcher’s major professor.

Each interview was in-depth, private, and face-to-face, and the interviews were open-ended and conversational in nature. However, the researcher also asked probing questions in order to gain the greatest amount of information possible about the
relationships between the superintendents and their principals in light of implementing the mandates of the *A Plus Reform Act of 2000*. An Interview Reflection Form was developed and used by the researcher following each interview (See Appendix C).

2. Fieldnotes

The researcher kept fieldnotes during all interview sessions. These notes became an additional source of data for the researcher. The researcher’s fieldnotes included: verbal descriptions of the setting and the activities, direct quotes as well as the substance of the interviews, and the researcher’s comments about initial interpretations and working hypotheses. For example, during Interview Three the state legislature was in session. This resulted in a focus on what impact the legislature could have on Georgia education this year.

3. Relevant artifacts

Relevant artifacts such as district board of education policies and superintendent memos to principals were retained as voluntarily shared by the participants.

**Summary of Data Collection Procedures**

Over a period of six months, the researcher gathered data from the multiple sources to understand the perspectives of the superintendents and their districts. Three interviews were conducted with each of the two superintendents. Additional data included fieldnotes and artifacts from each of the two districts.
Data Analysis

This study used the constant comparative method as the specific unit of analysis. Constant comparison analysis according to Glasser (1998) is a method of developing theory as follows:

1. Begin collecting data.
2. Look for key issues, recurrent events, in the data that become categories of focus.
3. Collect data that provide many incidents of the categories of focus.
4. Write about the categories, describing and accounting for all incidents in the data.
5. Work with the data to discover basic social processes and relationships.
6. Engage in sampling, coding, and writing as the analysis focuses on core categories. (p. 74)

Through the constant comparison method, the researcher first read each interview separately and then compared each interview to identify emergent themes. According to Glasser (1998), “the constant reading and reviewing of data is fundamental to the understanding of the methodology” (p. 75). When ideas were identified, the researcher noted their categories and properties and developed codes to represent these ideas. The researcher then coded each interview with the previous interview in mind. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2000):

Constant comparative methods consist of systemic inductive guidelines for collecting and analyzing data to build middle-range theoretical frameworks that explain the collected data. The data allows the researcher to develop analytical interpretations in order to focus further data collection, which in turn is used to inform and refine developing theoretical analyses. (p. 509)

Procedures for Data Analysis

Procedures of analyzing data are presented in the order in which they were conducted in this study of the perspectives of superintendents’ relationships with their building principals.
1. Transcripts of interviews, fieldnotes, and artifacts were gathered and read for content.

The researcher conducted three interviews with two superintendents over the course of the 2001-2002 school year. In total, the three interviews were conducted six weeks apart. At the conclusion of each interview, audio recordings were transcribed to identify emergent ideas (themes), categories, and their subsequent codes. Figure 3.1 provides a sampling of preliminary codes.

Figure 3.1 Preliminary Codes: Emergent Theme of Communication

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CODE</th>
<th>Categories, Properties, and Meanings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SC-BOE</td>
<td>Superintendent communication with BOE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SC-P</td>
<td>Superintendent communication with principals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SC-W</td>
<td>Superintendent communication, written</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SC-O</td>
<td>Superintendent communication, oral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SC-EF</td>
<td>Superintendent communication to eliminate fear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SC-K</td>
<td>Superintendent communicating knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SC-I</td>
<td>Superintendent communicating, informal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCP-O</td>
<td>Superintendent communicating with principals, obstacles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCP</td>
<td>Principals communicating with superintendent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Preliminary Code: Emergent Theme of the Superintendent’s Role in A Plus Reform

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CODE</th>
<th>Categories, Properties, and Meanings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SR-A</td>
<td>Superintendent’s role in analyzing A Plus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SR-I</td>
<td>Superintendent’s role, implementing A Plus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPO</td>
<td>Superintendent planning and organizing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCA</td>
<td>Superintendent communicating A Plus</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Preliminary Code: Emergent Theme of Accountability

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CODE</th>
<th>Categories, Properties, and Meanings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FE-P</td>
<td>Formal evaluation of principals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FE-P</td>
<td>Formal evaluation of principals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IE-P</td>
<td>Informal evaluation of principals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SC-E</td>
<td>Superintendent communicating expectations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Preliminary Code: Emergent Theme of Relationships Between Superintendent and Principals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CODE</th>
<th>Categories, Properties, and Meanings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AOR-N</td>
<td>Affect on relationship, no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AOR-Y</td>
<td>Affect on relationship, yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Also, the researcher analyzed the transcripts in to identify areas to follow-up with questions during the next interview. Fieldnotes were collected. Artifacts in the form of school system board policies and memos from the superintendents to their principals were collected.

2. The researcher added codes to the interview transcripts to identify themes. Transcripts were analyzed for the purpose of identifying themes. This provided information to structure subsequent interviews around common themes that emerged in the transcripts of previous interviews.

3. Interview memoing was added to list details observed during the interviews.
Coding and memoing provided the researcher with the vehicle to identify themes in a more clear and consistent manner. Commonality of codes resulted in an emerging theme. Categorizing by common codes delineated the data into specific themes. Figure 3.2 illustrates the Coding categories, definitions, and sub-categories.

Figure 3.2 Preliminary Coding Categories, Definitions, and Sub-Categories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coding Category</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Sub-Categories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>The various methods that the superintendent used to communicate with principals</td>
<td>Superintendent to Board of Education, Superintendent to principal, Principal to superintendent, Written, Oral, Formal, Informal, Communication of knowledge, Communication to eliminate fear, Communication through listening. Analyzing A Plus, Implementing A Plus, Defined role,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role of Superintendent</td>
<td>The various aspects of the work of the superintendent as associated with A Plus Reform Act of 2000</td>
<td>Analyzing A Plus, Implementing A Plus, Defined role,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Office Support</td>
<td>The role of personnel in central office in implementing the A Plus mandate</td>
<td>Central Office responsibility, Taking burden from principals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change/Unchange of Relationships</td>
<td>How the relationship between superintendent and principal either changed or did not change as a result of implementing the A Plus Reform Act of 2000</td>
<td>Adapting to change, Change in work relationship, No change in work relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Style of Leadership</td>
<td>The superintendent’s style of leadership as he communicated with principals</td>
<td>Superintendent leadership style, Empowering Principals, Empowering Teachers,</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The lack of research identifying superintendents’ relationships with their principals in light of accountability led the researcher to use the constant comparative
method of data analysis. It was the hope that this study would produce data that would identify the challenges facing superintendents and their relationships with their principals while implementing state initiated reform mandates.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is an essential component in an applied field such as education (Merriam, 1998). Trustworthiness in a study can be categorized by determining that the qualitative data is valid, reliable, generalizable, and neutral. To ensure trustworthiness, the researcher inquired continuously, by asking questions before, during, and after the interviews. The researcher observed, listened to, and then assimilated a sense quantity of information without bias. The researcher exhibited adaptability and flexibility to accommodate unanticipated events.

Validity

Qualitative research focuses on whether data are valid, meaning that data represent what it was intended to represent. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) asserted:

> To reduce the likelihood of misrepresentation qualitative researchers employ various procedure, two of the most common being redundancy of data gathering and procedural challenges to explanations. For qualitative casework, these procedures are generally called triangulation. (p. 443)

In this study, validity was confirmed in three ways. All data were read numerous times by the researcher. Second, the researcher’s major professor was asked to corroborate findings by reading and coding a sample of the data. Third, the participants, two superintendents, were given the opportunity to read and respond to all data. Validity was also addressed by member checks. Before the second and third interviews were conducted, participants were briefed concerning emerging themes that the researcher had identified in the data. During these interviews, the participants were given the
opportunity to agree or disagree whether these themes were credible. Copies of transcripts were given to the participants before the last interview in order to obtain their view of the accuracy of the transcripts. It is noted that both superintendents agreed with the transcripts as they were presented in their final form. They had no additions to make and when asked if they would like to clarify information in the transcripts, their responses were, “No.”

Reliability

In a broad sense, reliability can be defined as the extent to which findings in a study can be replicated. This is difficult in the social sciences due to the fact that the researcher is studying human behavior, which is most likely to be different from case to case (Merriam, 1998). To a large extent, reliability in qualitative research depends on the credibility of the researcher to gather data that is high in quality. According to Miles and Huberman (1994):

In qualitative research, issues of instrument reliability ride largely on the skills of the researcher. Essentially a person – more or less fallibly – is observing, interviewing, and recording, while modifying the observation, interviewing, and recording devices from one field trip to the next. Thus you need to ask, how valid and reliable is this person likely to be as an information-gathering instrument? (p. 38)

The reliability of this study was confirmed using the following strategies:

1. The researcher’s position statements described the relationship between the researcher and the participants.

2. Triangulation of data from multiple sources (e.g., transcripts of interviews, fieldnotes, artifacts) was used to confirm the themes that emerged from the data.

3. An anonymous expert and the dissertation chair audited data.
4. Prior to conducting the study, the researcher presented his perspectives on administration, the superintendency, and his work as an educator.

The researcher’s perspectives are fully enumerated in Appendix D.

Generalizability

Generalization refers to the ability to generalize based on the findings of a case study. Generalizations can be a working hypothesis, to be tested again by another researcher at a later date. According to Stake (1978):

Case by case uniqueness is seldom an ingredient of scientific theory. Researchers cannot avoid generalizations. They generalize to happenings of their cases. They expect readers to comprehend the reported interpretations but to modify their (the reader’s) own. Intrinsic case study can be seen as a small step toward grand generalization, especially if the case runs counter to the existing rule. (p. 439)

In this study, the researcher recognized that generalizability was a limitation of the method. While the findings are germane to the participants, it was hoped that the results of the study would prove valuable to other superintendents as they evaluate their relationships with their principals while implementing educational reform mandates.

Neutrality

Neutrality refers to the degree to which the findings of a study represent the data reported by the participants and is not resultant from the bias or perspectives of the researcher (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Miles and Huberman (1994) stated:

Outsiders to a group influence insiders and vice versa. Researchers, especially at the outset, are likely to create social behaviors in others that would not have occurred ordinarily. That behavior, in turn, can lead you into biased observations and inferences, thus confounding the natural characteristics of the setting with artificial effects of the researcher-participant relationship. (p. 265)

The researcher must be careful not to set out to prove a particular perspective or manipulate the data to get desired results. For example, during the analysis of data, data
revealed that there were no significant changes in the relationship between the superintendents and their principals as a result of the *A Plus Reform Act of 2000*. Both superintendents asserted that they had always had accountability and furthermore the absence or presence of mandates would not alter relationships. Yet, data did indicate that developing plans to implement procedures to comply with the *A Plus Reform Act of 2000* brought the administrators together more, as a team.

To assure neutrality in this study, the researcher listed those areas that could possibly induce bias in the study through a self-assessment in which the researcher documented his prior experiences as a principal and a central office administrator. It was necessary that the researcher identify those biases that were personal in nature as a result of past experiences. The researcher is currently a director in the central office of a school system and may well have preconceptions from the view of the superintendent as well as the principal. In order to account for possible preconceptions, prior to the study, the researcher audio-recorded statements of his personal beliefs concerning the relationships between superintendents and their principals. A full history of the researcher’s beliefs and subjectivity are elaborated in Appendix D. The purpose was to raise the researcher’s awareness of subjectivity in order to protect the trustworthiness of the findings.

**Chapter Summary**

A case study approach using the constant comparative method of data analysis was conducted in order to examine the perspectives of two Georgia superintendents’ and their relationship with their principals while implementing legislated mandates. Qualitative methods were chosen to gain a real-life perspective of the participants and
their experiences of working with site-level principals. Overriding research questions guided the study.

This study sought to examine two superintendents in their natural settings, while focusing on the ‘what’ and ‘why’ of their relationships with the principals of their districts. A case study approach was chosen for the purpose of extracting descriptions, events, and explanations of the dynamic phenomena of the relationships between these two superintendents and their principals.

There was a purposeful commonality in the participants who were selected. Each superintendent’s entire tenure as a teacher and then as an administrator had occurred in the state of Georgia. The participants had not been involved in any previous reform efforts in other states. Each was superintendent of a mid-sized school district in the suburbs of a large city.

Data for this study included interviews, fieldnotes, and artifacts. Three interviews were conducted with each superintendent of approximately 60-90 minutes in length and six weeks apart. Each transcript was analyzed in order to identify areas to follow-up with questions during future interviews. Codes were added to identify themes. Commonality of codes resulted in further identifying emerging themes.

Validity, reliability, and neutrality were addressed in this study. Validity was confirmed by numerous readings of the data, corroboration of findings by the researcher’s major professor and by member checks. Reliability was confirmed by position statements, triangulation of data, data audit, through the researcher’s perspective. Neutrality was addressed through areas listed, which could induce bias. Through self-assessment, the researcher documented prior experiences.
CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine the perspectives of two superintendents specifically relating to the relationships between building level principals and the superintendent in light of the *A Plus Reform Act of 2000*. The questions addressed in this study were:

1. What is the influence of the *A Plus Reform Act of 2000* on the superintendent’s work in the area of accountability for principals?

2. How do superintendents view their relationship with principals given the mandates that must now be implemented to comply with the *A Plus Reform Act of 2000*?

3. What is the impact of the *A Plus Reform Act of 2000* on the superintendent’s work in the area of division of responsibilities?

In this chapter, the context of this study was offered, the participants were profiled, the participants’ general perspectives of their work were described, and the findings were reported in relation to each of the research questions.

The Context of the Study

This study specifically examined superintendents’ perspectives of their relationship with their principals as they implemented the provisions of the *A Plus Reform Act of 2000* in two selected mid-size school districts in Georgia. As a result, purposeful sampling was
used in the selection of research participants. Each school district was a mid-sized school
district located in the Southeast.

Superintendents Dr. Richard Pritchett of the Callaway School District and Dr. Thomas Hardy of the Alexander School District (superintendent names and district names are pseudonyms) were chosen for this study for several reasons. Each superintendent’s entire tenure as a teacher and then as an administrator had to have been in the state of Georgia. The researcher wanted to study only superintendents who had experiences exclusively in Georgia and had not been involved in previous reform efforts in other states. This allowed for comparison equality. In addition, each was a superintendent of a mid-sized school district, which was a qualifying factor in the research selection criteria. This criterion was chosen due to the fact that all of the researcher’s experience had been in a mid-size school district and relating to each superintendent’s perspective would have more meaning to the researcher.

The Community of Calloway County

Calloway County was a suburb of a large Southeastern United States city. It had increased in population 103.2% between 1990 and 2000 and was recognized as the 4th fastest growing county in the United States. It had a population of 119,341, yet was once known as somewhat of a rural community.

The community was made up of 81.4% White, 14.7% Black, 2.3% Hispanic, 1.8% Asian, and 0.2% American Indian citizens. The community contained 43,166 housing units with an 85.2% homeownership rate. This community, which was once a small rural community, is today a thriving suburban community. Most of its citizens commute to the city to work. Population forecasts show that the county will continue to
grow over the next decade. This rapid growth posed a continued source of stress on the city and county infrastructure as well as the school system.

The population by age for Calloway County included: 0-17 years 37.3%, 18-24 years 9.2%, 25-44 years 28.6%, 45-64 years 17.1%, 65 years and over 7.4%, and 85 years and older 0.4%. The median age of Calloway County citizens was 32.7 years. Education levels for adults age 25 and older included: 22.6% were high school graduates and 3.3% had a bachelor’s degree or higher.

The median household income for Calloway County residents was $49,548. This was in comparison to the state median income of $36,372. Persons below poverty were 6.4%. The state average was 14.7%. New home and business building permits were increasing by more than 28%, yearly. Calloway County encompassed 323 square miles and had 369.5 persons per square mile.

The Calloway County School District

The Calloway County School District consisted of 29 schools (17 elementary, 6 middle, 4 high schools, 1 evening school). Another elementary and high school was slated to open during the 2002-2003 school year. There were 25,301 students enrolled in the school system. The pupil-teacher ratio was 18:1. Average daily attendance was 94.5 percent. Two schools had been named Georgia Schools of Excellence. The average expenditure per-pupil was $6,066. The 2001-2002 annual budget was $151 million. Fifty percent of the faculty had advanced degrees, and the average teaching experience was 12.9 years. Thirty seven percent of Calloway County graduates received college prep diplomas, 35% received both college and vocational diplomas, and 25% received vocational diplomas.
At this rate of growth, the school system population continues to increase by two classrooms per week. By 2006, the student population is projected to exceed 40,000. Calloway County added 378 new teachers to their staff in 2001. The school system had over 200 portable classrooms, and most schools were experiencing a strain on its infrastructure such as overly congested hallways, restrooms, and cafeterias. The Board of Education planned to build an additional 12 new schools over the next 6 years.

Analysis of growth in enrollment illustrated that the Calloway County School System took 21 years to grow from 6,000 to 10,000 students. It took 10 years to grow from 10,000 to 20,000 students. However, it will take only 6 years to grow from 20,000 to 30,000 students and only 4 years to grow from 30,000 to 40,000 students. Figures 4.1, 4.2, and 4.3 illustrate the academic achievement of the Calloway County School district.

**Figure 4.1 Stanford 9 Norm Reference Test – National Percentile Rank**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Reading</th>
<th>Math</th>
<th>Science</th>
<th>Social Studies</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grade 3</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 5</td>
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<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 8</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>53</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 4.2 Georgia Criterion Competency Test – Percent Passing**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Reading</th>
<th>Language Arts</th>
<th>Math</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grade 4</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 6</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 8</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>61</td>
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</table>
Figure 4.3 Georgia High School Graduation Test – Percent Passing

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Language Arts</th>
<th>Math</th>
<th>Social Studies</th>
<th>Science</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>96</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Community of Alexander County

Alexander County was also a suburb of a large Southeastern city. It had a population of 94,869. It had experienced a population growth rate of 46.2% between 1990 and 2000. The community was made up of 87.67% White, 7.64% Black, 4.4% Hispanic, 3.84% Asian, and 0.85% other citizens. The community contained 32,726 housing units with an 86.4% homeownership rate. Population forecasts indicate that the county would continue to grow over the decade.

Similar to Calloway County, the population by age for Alexander County included: 0-17 years 28.3%, 18-24 years 6.6%, 25-44 years 34.4%, 45-64 years 23.3%, 65 years and over 7.3%, and 85 years and older 0.6%. The median age of Alexander County citizens was 34.2 years. Education levels for adults age 25 and older included: 30.1% were high school graduates and 25.8% had a bachelor’s degree or higher.

The median household income for Alexander County residents was $68,852. Persons living below poverty were 4%. Alexander County encompassed 197 square miles and had 463 persons per square mile.

The School District of Alexander County

There were 25 schools in Alexander County. Of these, there were 6 high schools, 6 middle schools, and 13 elementary schools. One high school in the county was an evening high school. Another high school was an alternative high school. Twelve
Alexander County schools had been designated Georgia Schools of Excellence since 1987. Approximately 94% of Alexander County graduates had gone on to higher education, over 87% had chose colleges and universities, and almost 7% went to vocational schools or community colleges.

The general fund expenditures for the Alexander County School district for 2001-2002 totaled $126,971,632. These expenditures supported a student enrollment of 19,832. Per pupil expenditures were $6,402.36. Figures 4.4, 4.5, and 4.6 illustrate the academic achievement of students in the Alexander County School district.

Figure 4.4 Stanford 9 Norm Reference Test – National Percentile Rank

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Reading</th>
<th>Math</th>
<th>Science</th>
<th>Social Studies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grade 3</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grade 5</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 8</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4.5 Georgia Criterion Competency Test – Percent Passing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Reading</th>
<th>Language Arts</th>
<th>Math</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grade 4</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 6</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 8</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4.6 Georgia High School Graduation Test – Percent Passing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language Arts</th>
<th>Math</th>
<th>Social Studies</th>
<th>Science</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>98</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 4.7 illustrates a side-by-side comparison of the Calloway District (Dr. Richard Pritchett) and the Alexander District (Dr. Thomas Hardy). Both of the suburban school districts are located geographically close to each other. While many of the comparative items below are similar, each district is uniquely different.

Figure 4.7 Comparisons of Calloway and Pritchett School Districts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items of Comparison</th>
<th>Calloway School District</th>
<th>Alexander School District</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Schools</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Elementary</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Middle Schools</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of High Schools</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students Served</td>
<td>25,301</td>
<td>19,832</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher/Pupil Ratio</td>
<td>1:18</td>
<td>1:19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Per Pupil Expenditure</td>
<td>$6,066</td>
<td>$6,402.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>System Budget</td>
<td>$151 million</td>
<td>$127 million</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Participant Profiles

Participants for this study included the superintendent (Dr. Richard Pritchett) of the Calloway School District and the superintendent (Dr. Thomas Hardy) of the Alexander School District. Both participants were white males, held doctoral degrees, and had served two years as superintendent prior to this study. Figure 4.8 provides and overview of the Dr. Pritchett and Dr. Hardy’s work experience.
Each superintendent was interviewed three times approximately six weeks apart. Interviews were audiotaped and later transcribed for coding. This section provides a profile of each participant. As noted earlier, each participant was assigned a pseudonym to protect confidentiality.

Dr. Richard Pritchett

Dr. Richard Pritchett was the superintendent of the Calloway County School District. Dr. Pritchett had been an educator for 23 years. He had taught at the high school level for seven years. He had served as an administrator for 14 years prior to assuming the superintendency of Calloway County. This service included four years as an assistant principal, four years as a principal, four years as Director of Personnel, and Assistant Superintendent for Instruction for two years. He served all of his administrative roles in the Calloway District. He had been superintendent of Calloway for two years,
and this was his first superintendency. Dr. Pritchett also was born and educated in Calloway County.

Dr. Pritchett’s experiences as principal and Assistant Superintendent for Instruction self-reportedly influenced his values as what is most important for a superintendent. Pritchett was an advocate of educational opportunities for students, and he indicated, “He has never removed himself from the understanding of what goes on in a school.” Dr. Pritchett understood the perspective of the students, teachers, and principals. This understanding, he indicated, “under girthed all the decisions” he made for the school system.

The position of superintendent was not one Dr. Pritchett was seeking when this position became available. After the former superintendent left unexpectedly, Dr. Pritchett was asked to assume the position. He was “hesitant and uncertain” if the superintendency was something he wanted at that time in his career, and Dr. Pritchett agreed to the superintendency on an “interim basis.” Six month later, Dr. Pritchett came to the conclusion that he could have a “more positive impact on what was going on in the schools as superintendent.” Since that time, Dr. Pritchett admitted he “reminds himself often” that what he is doing in this job “directly impacts on those children in the classrooms.” Having been a principal, Pritchett admitted “keeps his focus on students” even though he indicated “many of his duties and responsibilities” have taken him “further away from a classroom or school” than he would like to be.

Dr. Pritchett viewed the duty of superintendent as an “administrative arm” of the school system. He believed that the board of education sets policy, and that it was the function of the superintendent to carry out the policies that the board of education
enacted. He viewed board members as “laypeople” and that the administrators were the “educational professionals.” Pritchett viewed the “back and forth exchange of information” as a primary responsibility of the superintendent “to keep moving to avoid stagnation of the system.”

The role of the superintendent has been one of “orchestrating the departments of a school system,” according to Dr. Pritchett. Along with being the orchestrator of responsibilities, Dr. Pritchett believed he must be “the person that paints and communicates the vision of where the school system wants to go and how to get there.”

Dr. Pritchett believes as superintendent, that “communication is the key skill of the job,” and he elaborated, “Effective communication is a daily essential to deal with the ‘here and now’ as well as a tool for looking into the future.” He believed, “if the superintendent only looked at what would be happening next year, he would already be behind.” According to Dr. Pritchett, “When you get right down to it, we are asked to look into a crystal ball and project what our needs will be for the next seven years from now.”

Dr. Thomas Hardy

Dr. Thomas Hardy started his career in education 26 years ago. He began as a K-5 science teacher, and then he taught science at the middle school level. He became an administrator after seven years in the classroom. All of his administrative experience has been in the Alexander School District. He served as a high school assistant principal for three and a half years. He was an elementary principal for four and a half years. Hardy then became Executive Director of Education and then later Assistant
Superintendent of Education for the Alexander School District. This was Hardy’s third year as superintendent of Alexander County.

Dr. Hardy had been in the Alexander District for 23 years. He had seen the district grow from a rural district to what is “now” a fast growing suburban area. He was responsible for 20,370 students and 3500 employees, and there were 25 schools in which he supervised as many principals.

Dr. Hardy viewed his position of superintendent as a “dynamic one.” When he first began as superintendent, “every day was a crisis.” He reported, that “as time has gone by” he now “accepted that crisis was just part of the job.” Hardy described every day as “different with its own set of problems,” and he had learned to “accept that” and “to deal with it as it comes.”

Dr. Hardy identified the “ability to work with people” as the key skill that a superintendent must have. Moreover, Hardy believed that communication is “important” and that “listening was more important than speaking.” He believed in empowering employees, and as superintendent, Hardy found that “it was impossible for him to do everything and know everything,” thus “employees must be empowered to make decisions.”

Dr. Hardy felt that working in different capacities in the district had allowed him to identify with the people that report to him. Hardy believed that because he had been a principal and a central office administrator, that he understood “what they were going through,” and could “lend advice from his experiences” as an administrator.
Dr. Hardy related that his experiences had also given him “the opportunity to be known in the community” and that through dealing with “a lot of different people and getting to know their needs” created an advantage for him now in his role as superintendent. When interviewing for the job of superintendent, he stressed, “If the board wanted someone who knew the system, the people, the history, and the community—then I was the person for the job.”

Dr. Hardy viewed one of his major strengths as the fact that he had been an administrator in the school system for 23 years, and he knew “the history of the organization, the culture of the organization, and what made the system work” prior to becoming superintendent. Dr. Hardy reported that the issues facing him were “different” than when he first took the job as superintendent. Where once he had difficulty dealing with all the different agendas of people and the fact that everyone wanted his time, he became “adept at seeing it coming ahead of time” and began “to prioritize his time and interests so that people always know where I am coming from before they enter my office.” Hardy felt that due to his ability to establish his expectations and procedures, he “finally had more time to be reflective and proactive.”

Dr. Hardy used the analogy of a football drill to describe the role of the superintendent. He said that the superintendency is like:

A circle of players with one in the middle. The coach calls a number and someone behind you wallops you. You never know they are coming. You turn around, and you get smacked again. You never have time to get set.

Hardy said “that since I have had three years in the job, I can see problems and issues before they escalate,” and because “I can forecast, I am in a position to seeing them come and be prepared to respond more proactively than reactively.”
Accountability For Principals

In this study, the two superintendents described the influence of the *A Plus Reform Act of 2000* on their work in the area of accountability for principals. Each superintendent viewed the *A Plus Reform Act of 2000* as a legislative mandate of “mammoth proportion.” Accountability of principals for their schools was just “one in a multitude of mandates” that each of the superintendents reported as one of their “top priorities.”

Both superintendents believed that essentially they were at the “mercy” of the legislators, and Hardy believed that all of the reform measures were “thrust on his district with little or no guidance from higher ups.” Both Hardy and Pritchett believed that their districts were left, to a large extent, to interpret the changes without clear guidelines and absolute answers on how to interpret, implement, and evaluate the results of their efforts in regard to the *A Plus Reform Act of 2000*. Reflecting on the ambiguity related to knowing how to begin “making sense of the *A Plus*,” Dr. Pritchett “quickly realized that accountability for student achievement” was a cornerstone of the law. Dr. Pritchett said, “principals were to face the fate of the success or failure of their teachers and students.” Both participants in this study, however, felt that their principals already had procedures in place for high expectations for student performance, and they, as superintendents have always held high expectations for the principals. Each superintendent described their methods of evaluating principals, their primary mechanism for holding principals accountable for student achievement.

Commonalities in the descriptions of how these superintendents held principals accountable emerged in the interview transcripts. For both superintendents,
accountability for principals prior to and during the implementation of the *A Plus Reform Act of 2000* emerged through a) communicating expectations to their principals b) evaluating principals informally and c) evaluating principals formally. Due to the marked differences in the work of superintendent than that of principals, both reported, frequent contact and monitoring of their principals was somewhat limited.

**Communicating Expectations to Principals**

Both Dr. Pritchett and Dr. Hardy emphasized that communication was important and between them, they used such words as “cornerstone, critical, brick and mortar, and glue” to describe the relative importance of communicating as a central means to ensure high expectations for principals and the work they do. In fact, analysis of data revealed that the superintendents related every aspect of their work and accountability to communication. Figure 4.9 explicates the theme of communication, its practices, and the perspective derived from the analysis of data from interview transcripts, fieldnotes, and artifacts that included sample memos, e-mails, and other correspondence.

Figure 4.9 Perspective: Superintendent as Communicator.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Practices</th>
<th>Perspectives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communication patterns of the superintendent</td>
<td>Communicating to: Board of Education, public, external agencies, principals, parents. Communication is related to expectations that, in turn, are related to evaluation (both formal and informal).</td>
<td>One primary function of the superintendent is to be a communicator.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Regarding communication, Hardy repeatedly indicated the “paramount importance” of clearly “communicating expectations” to principals. Each superintendent had their own style of communicating their expectations. Pritchett made clear, however, that the expectations of the A Plus Reform Act of 2000 is “just one in a line of many things” that “must be clearly communicated to principals.”

Dr. Hardy viewed the A Plus Reform Act of 2000 as having an effect on how he communicated expectations. He noted:

My job as superintendent has changed under A Plus in that I have to bring people along. Some say ‘hey this is just another thing they are doing and it will go away.’ So you try to bring them along and try to adjust the goals that we set. A Plus has caused a big change in how we do our planning and how we can bring people along with expectations.

Dr. Hardy expressed that prior to A Plus, “most of his system planning has been at the central office level.” The planning involved the “reorganization of the processes for finance and budget” to meet the stipulations of the new law. Dr. Pritchett talked about the qualities of communication that must, in his opinion, be present, “especially in light of A Plus,” like this:

In dealing with any expectations, but especially A Plus, you must be honest, genuine, and sincere about what you are asking principals to do. Let them know it is not just top-down decision of saying, ‘here is what you have to do’ but it is ‘Here is what we have to do.’ That type of climate has to exist to get the lasting results that we are looking for.

Pritchett described his method to accomplish the task of “getting lasting results.” Each summer Dr. Pritchett, the central office staff, and all principals attend a summer system retreat for one week. At this retreat, “all of the players learn what the others are doing” so that they are “all on the same page.” Pritchett believed the use of a system-wide retreat allowed all to see the role of others and how people and the roles they
assume in the county are “dependent on each other for the success of the district.”

Pritchett also believed that the retreat afforded “everyone the opportunity to see the big picture of the district” rather than the limited aspect of what each does individually. This was important to Pritchett because Callaway County had 29 schools with as many principals that needed to hear “clear expectations.”

Both superintendents reported that they involved their principals in decision-making concerning A Plus from the beginning, and as a result, both felt that the principals needed to be involved in establishing their own expectations and have a “say” in how to reach the goals established by the superintendent and board of education. Hardy asserted that by involving his “25 principals in the process early that they had more ‘ownership’ and ‘internal pressure’ to perform in such a way to meet goals.” Hardy and Pritchett did not want their principals to work in isolation; they both indicated that they strove to be “proactive” in providing the mechanism to be inclusive. Hardy believed that his district was “stronger as a result of including his principals” in the process of “tackling A Plus.”

According to Schlechty (1990), when individuals work in isolation, without shared purpose or common vision of the ideal school, the schools in the district do not improve. It is the relationship between district personnel, primarily the superintendent, and the schools that sustain the efforts of change in the individual schools. This ownership by principals in these two districts, according to the superintendents, allowed principals to be less fearful of the A Plus Reform Act of 2000. What was originally viewed as a “giant and feared reform,” suddenly became “more tangible” as principals were allowed to help create procedures for implementation, and Dr. Hardy stated:
We held meetings to troubleshoot _A Plus_. We figure quickly that there was no roadmap. No one gave us any direction so we had to do what we thought was best. A lot of principals were involved in this decision making so they helped in establishing the expectations. We used teacher and principal committees to come up with a way to implement the mandated programs effectively.

Dr Pritchett and his principals also devised a “home grown” method to insure accountability in their system. Principals helped to establish what was called the “balanced scorecard” for the system of schools. The balanced scorecard incorporated the mandates of _A Plus_, but took the process a step further by allowing principals to target individual goals and to align state goals to the system. The scorecard also allowed principals to put in place, according to Pritchett, the “personal strategies” of what the principals defined as “excellence” and “what would need to be done to achieve excellence.” With the principals devising this method, Pritchett reported that the principals felt they had a say “in the establishment of their own accountability system.” According to Dr. Pritchett, “The balanced scorecard will set the vision for the system, but there will be measurable indicators.” Pritchett said he asked his principals at the beginning of the process: “How can you tell if you are even heading in the right direction without some indicators or measurements.” Dr. Pritchett furthered elaborated that by “setting the stage for _A Plus_ early in the ball game” that he “really set the stage for no surprises in the end.”

Both superintendents believed in setting high expectations and “communication was essential” not only in the setting of expectations but also in “tracking the life” of expectations, said Hardy. Communication was “extended” throughout the school year through the use of “purposefully planned” monthly meetings, and system-wide expectations were, according to Pritchett, “reiterated at these monthly administrator
meetings.” Not unusual, each superintendent reported conducting one of these meetings the day after the Board of Education Meeting. This meeting time provided the opportunity to not only disseminate timely information but also the opportunity to provide feedback for principals and to get feedback from principals. Moreover, the monthly meeting time provided the principals with a forum to share with the superintendent and other principal’s common issues surrounding accountability. Dr. Hardy said, “There are also monthly principal meetings by level (elementary, middle, and high school).” Hardy said that at these meetings, “I update them but it is also important then that I sit and listen to my principals.”

Similarly, Dr. Pritchett indicated that his monthly meetings are critical, and that these meetings provided the opportunity for his principals to “converge” to update him and others. Pritchett used the meeting as a strategy not only to communicate, in general with his principals, but also, as a strategy to keep “expectations at the front of everyone’s view.” Pritchett explained:

I would like to think that communication is very direct during those meetings. I tell our administrators what I expect. During the course of the year, I will reinforce what those expectations are. I try to be straightforward with them as I possibly can be and not leave them guessing as to what they should or should not be doing or what my expectations of them are.

In this study, both superintendents communicated that expectations of principals have “not necessarily gone up” due to the A Plus Reform Act, and both felt that they had prior to A Plus, mechanisms in place for the planning and organizing of components that “lended themselves to high expectations.” Dr. Hardy elaborated his perspectives like this:

A Plus has been more of a bureaucratic change than an educational change. The changes were in the number of students in classes, and funding areas, but the relationship between the superintendent and what I expect from my principals I
think was always there for me. We were always meeting with the principals to discuss what we expected. We were doing all that prior to A Plus.

And although Dr. Pritchett agreed, to an extent with Dr. Hardy, Pritchett believed that “his principals were stressed and distressed” with the “hyperbole and rhetoric surrounding A Plus.” Pritchett explained:

Principals felt the pressure from A Plus. It is natural. The big thing is that we at the central level makes sure that principals understand what we are communicating to them and how that actually comes out in the form of them implementing it at the school level. The balanced scorecard, which we imposed on ourselves, shows that our standards have been even higher than those of A Plus.

The impact of the School Report Card issued from the State Office of Accountability as a result of the A Plus Reform Act of 2000 has had minimal effect on the system and the schools according to the participants in this study. For example, Pritchett surmised that the Report Card did not “tell us anything we did not already know,” about the schools in his district. Both superintendents agreed that the State Report Card did, however, provide information to a wider audience, and Pritchett asserted that, “the report card is a public vehicle of sharing information about schools with the community.” Dr. Hardy explained:

The Report Card has been insignificant as to the way we do things because I feel that we’ve been doing things right all along and the report card did not have that much of an impact. We have always had high expectations and always expected the principals to focus on that. We got a jump-start with South Association Accreditation, the school improvement model, about seven years ago. The schools have been developing school improvement plans for years. The A Plus Reform Act was too late for all that.

Conversely, according to Dr. Pritchett:

We want our principals to familiarize themselves with their Report Card data so they can be prepared to respond if people ask questions of them. It has made us become more proactive in communicating with our principals on the front lines.
The Report Card does make things more quantifiable, and it will be results driven. But let me say, ‘I am not about hammering principals about test scores. I am about improving student learning so that our students can demonstrate competence on any assessment they are given.’

Each superintendent admitted that they used various methods to communicate expectations to principals. Each believed in the value of both written and oral communication. According to Dr. Pritchett, written documentation allows individuals an opportunity to use different learning styles, and written forms of communication, “also affords you the opportunity to go back and review information that otherwise you may not retain.” Dr. Hardy used the same methods but added, “that there are times when you have to go out and see somebody face-to-face. The key to this is customizing communication to fit the situation at hand.”

Communicating of high expectations is what drives a school system to be successful, and Hayes (2001), reported the value of communication and high expectations in his research of superintendents working with principals. According to Hayes, “of all the tasks performed by the superintendent of schools, selecting and working with building principals may be among the most important” (p. 74). Communicating expectations and motivating principals into high performance is a delicate art for a superintendent. Focus must be on the “why” as well as the “how.” Dr. Pritchett summarized this delicate art this way:

I try to always explain why we are doing what we are doing and what we hope the outcome or results will be so that principals have a better understanding of why we are doing it. I want principals to think and to use the information that they have to make good decisions in their schools.
Evaluating Principals Informally

Much is written about how principals evaluate teachers. It is usually a very quantifiable process that is universal throughout a school district. Principals are in the buildings with their teachers daily, and they are able to evaluate teachers based on the frequent contacts they have with them. On the other hand, the superintendents’ evaluation of their principals is a perplexing issue. Superintendents are typically separated from the schoolhouse; therefore, they supervise from a distance. Informal evaluation of a principal’s work is just as important as the formal end-of-year evaluation that principals receive. For Pritchett and Hardy, they were responsible for evaluating both formally and informally a total of 54 principals. Davis and Hensley (1999) shared the difficulty of the face-to-face evaluation of principals like this: “Principal assessment must be based on activities, decisions and behaviors that are weighed against an ever-changing array of situational variables” (p. 22).

Each superintendent in this study agreed on the importance of informal evaluation of principals. The communication, personal dialogue, and one-on-one experiences created for an informal process of evaluation of the work accomplished by their principals. When aggregated, data revealed closely related to high expectations were formal and informal evaluations of principals. Figure 4.10 illustrates the relationship of the theme of the superintendent as communicator and its delimitation to the second overall perspective, high expectations set by the superintendent provides the mechanism for formal and informal evaluation of principals.
Both superintendents agreed that going into the schools and being with the principals is extremely important. Time to do this was another matter for Dr. Hardy and Dr. Pritchett, however.

Dr. Hardy described his informal evaluation this way:

I try to rotate visiting my principals so that I will go visit with each principal once per month. I will visit with the principal and then we walk around, talk, sit in the cafeteria, and just discuss things. It gives them an opportunity to discuss things with me and me with them.

Dr. Pritchett found that it is very “difficult” to get into the schools as often as he would like. Pritchett said:

It is just humanly impossible for one person to be in the schools on an ongoing basis. You’re supervising from a distance. I try to spend as much time with them personally as possible. There are occasions I have to speak to a principal about a matter. I do not bury them in paperwork. In nine out of ten times I follow up a meeting I have in writing. If it has not been written, it has not been done.

Most of the time it is more informal. Yesterday I was in Kinchen. So I went by Kinchen High School. I asked the principal if he minded if I had lunch with him and that I knew they had good lunches. While eating lunch, I can obtain a lot of information as well help him with any questions he may have. I would give myself an ‘A’ for effort for wanting to get into schools but an ‘F’ for actually having the time to do it.
Both Hardy and Pritchett reported that although their intentions were “good,” the demands of their work as superintendent precluded them from “getting out and about” in schools. Most of the informal monitoring of principals occurred “during walk throughs of schools” one-on-one conversations with principals after monthly meetings, and while responding to situations that arose in the buildings.” It appeared that Pritchett’s assessment of his situation, as “an ‘A’ for effort ... and an ‘F’ for actually having time to do it” summarized the informal aspects of evaluating principals.

Evaluating Principals Formally

The formal evaluation of a principal becomes the written record of assessment made by the superintendent (See Figure 4.9). Usually, the evaluation is marked with ambiguous and dimensions left open for multiple interpretation (Moore, 2001). Some believed this ambiguity is due to the fact that all schools are different, and it is difficult to evaluate all principals by a specifically defined set of criteria (Hensley, 1999; Moore, 2001). Hensley (1999) and Moore (2001) reported in their studies that superintendent evaluations of principals are informal and distanced from direct contact, and the evaluations of principals are based on indirect information (e.g., student performance on standardized tests).

Dr. Hardy used a formative and summative evaluative process for evaluating his principals. Hardy reported that he met with his principals “twice per year on a formal basis” for the purpose of “keeping a handle on work accomplished toward meeting goals by each one of his principals.” Hardy also used the formal meetings with his principals as a “method to assure” that he had “effectively communicated his expectations from
beginning of the year” and that principals were following through with his “set expectations.” Dr. Hardy stated:

I ask each principal to give the school improvement office and me his or her goals at the beginning of the year in writing. The school improvement office sets up measurable goals and objectives for each school, like the number of students taking the SAT, AP classes, dropout rates, etc. We discuss these in both sessions. Through this process we determine if they understand what we wanted...and we make sure there is follow through.

According to Dr. Pritchett, his “balanced scorecard” had become the “instrument” for his formally evaluating the principals in his school system. The scorecard “focuses on continuous improvement for both”, the system and more importantly, for the principals in my system, stated Pritchett. According to Pritchett:

The scorecard analysis comes from baseball. A manager keeps a scorecard so he can constantly take a quick look at that card to see how each player has performed, who has played, who has not and what you have in reserve on the bench. So what we are looking for are specific indicators of school success. Then we have a number that addresses most of the areas in the school system. The number may be different depending on the socio-economic levels of the students at the schools. The balanced scorecard gives me a quick reference of performance of a school and principal. Everyone sings from the same page.

Hardy and Pritchett agreed that when a principal is not performing, an “effective superintendent” must take corrective measures. The formal evaluation process, according to Pritchett, “allows the superintendent to take the steps necessary to document areas that need improving.” Both superintendents agreed that when a principal is not performing, it is an “injustice” to that person not to address the “weaknesses” identified. Dr. Hardy elaborated his point-of-view for dealing with ineffective principals like this:

If things were not going well, then the principal would be treated just like a teacher and complete a professional development plan. He would have to set some goals and objectives. If the principal does not have tenure or was performing in a way that was totally unacceptable, we would go through the same process, either a non-renewal or termination. We try to work with them on their weaknesses and help out there. If a person is having too many problems you
cannot let it go on. I have not had to let anyone go yet but I have had to move some from one position to another to try to help that person.

Likewise, Dr. Pritchett reported that evaluating principals gets “tricky” and that:

Some evaluations are simple. Others are more difficult to get your hands around so you must spend more time with them. When evaluating a principal you must be open and honest. To do anything other would be an injustice for that person and the school they serve.

Both Hardy and Pritchett believed that the most difficult aspect of their job was to work with a principal “who just wasn’t making...not hitting the mark on the scorecard,” and “whose performance was not meeting expectations,” indicated Pritchett. Hardy and Pritchett’s practices of evaluating principals support what has been previously reported in the literature, and according to Johnson (1996), “Superintendents should supervise as well as evaluate principals directly, providing them with complete and accurate information about the superintendent’s priorities and expectations” (p. 265).

Section Summary

In this study, accountability for principals took the form of communicating high expectations, conducting informal evaluation of principals, as well as, conducting the formal evaluation of principals. Both participants in this study cited that the differences in the work of superintendents and principals resulted in infrequent contact and somewhat limited monitoring. Both Dr. Hardy and Dr. Pritchett believed in the importance of communicating high expectations for principals. Each viewed communicating the expectations as one of the most important aspects of their job. Both described their monthly administrator meetings as a forum in which well-planned information was communicated as well as making expectations clear.
Each superintendent described informal methods of evaluating principals. Informal evaluation methods included one-on-one contact made during site visitations, discussions at monthly meetings, and other “opportune meetings” created the avenues for this process. Each also expressed a strong desire to have more time for personal contact at the schools. While Dr. Pritchett had a great desire to visit with principals more often, Dr. Hardy viewed this as a priority, and he made time for this “important activity.” This personal method of evaluation opened opportunities for ongoing dialogue, soothed concerns of principals, and allowed these superintendents a first hand view of whether principals were meeting expectations. Time, on the part of the superintendent to conduct these activities, was always a problem.

Methods for formal evaluation of principals differed between the two participants in this study. Dr. Hardy relied on one summative and one formal evaluation for each principal. He evaluated principals based on whether or not they met system goals as well as goals established by the system school improvement office and the principal. He also used this information as a way to determine if the expectations he had set had been clearly communicated to each principal during the year.

Dr. Pritchett’s formal evaluation of principals was implemented through the system’s “balanced scorecard.” This scorecard approach allowed Pritchett and his principals to establish measurable criteria of performance for the school system. Each school and thus each principal were evaluated based on the accomplishment of these system standards at the school level.
Each superintendent discussed the need to address with principals if there were areas in need of improvement. Each viewed openness and honesty with the principal concerning their performance as critical. Neither superintendent had terminated a principal due to poor performance.

Effect on Relationships

The second question of this study was designed to discover the superintendent’s perspectives on how the impact of the *A Plus Reform Act of 2000* affected the superintendents’ relationships with their principals. Both participants were emphatic that the *A Plus Reform Act of 2000* had not affected their relationships with their principals in a negative way. Both agreed that due to the superintendents and principals having to work closely together to establish procedure for its implementation, their relationships had grown stronger as a result of the process. Figure 4.10 presents the third perspective delimited from the study: Regardless of state mandated reform, relationships between the superintendent and their principals are neither made nor broken as a result of legislated mandates.

Figure 4.10: Perspective: Mandated Reform and the Relationships Between Superintendents and Their Principals

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For Dr Pritchett, the mandates of the *A Plus Reform Act of 2000* were negligible with regard to his relationships with his principals, and he stated:

Our relationship has not changed. It may have taken more time to spend on certain programs and components of that law, but the manner in which we have gone about it certainly not changed.

Dr. Hardy agreed with Pritchett, but added, “I think that *A Plus* has solidified our relationship because we had to work through it together.” Yet, Hardy was resolute, that although he had to work more with his principals, this work, “did not change the relationships” he had with his principals. Hardy, added, “I work with my people the same—I have expectations, and they meet them.”

Each superintendent identified their longevity in the current school system as the major factor contributing to why their relationships with principals had not changed as a result of implementing the provisions of the *A Plus Reform Act of 2000*. Both participants had been teachers, principals, and assistant superintendents in the systems in which they now served as superintendent. Dr. Hardy exclaimed, “I have been here a long time and I know them [the principals] personally, and we have a good working relationship.” Likewise, Dr. Pritchett reported:

I was one of them in the same school district. Many times when a principal calls me, they preface their comments with, ‘I know you understand what I am doing because you have sat in my chair.’ Our relationships have been open and inviting all along. My role in *A Plus* has been to constantly buffer principals. We see many times the way things are portrayed from maybe the governor’s office or the Department of Education, and I think that does not have a positive impact on schools.

Both superintendents agreed that communication is the cornerstone to building and sustaining good working relationships with principals. According to Dr. Pritchett, “Relationships are also about sharing information.” Pritchett further stated, “I want
everyone to know the same thing I do so we can all understand it at the same level.”

Both superintendents believed that many things get in their way of them to effectively communicate with principals, however. Each also agreed that there is a difference between “effective communication” and “too much communication,” and Hardy believed that “principals view too much involvement by the superintendent as micromanaging, and that’s not good.” According to Dr. Hardy:

> We have a balance that is good. They know they can contact me at anytime. I think they probably feel like they do not want me in their hair too much. They want me available but not looking over their shoulder at what they do.

Both Dr. Hardy and Dr. Pritchett established that there were “Nay Sayers” about *A Plus*, originally. Each of the superintendents took the approach with their principals that even though they may have “reservations,” that “they were ‘all in this thing’ together,” according to Pritchett. Hardy reported that the approach that was taken was “that instead of commiserating with each other, they were going to see what was in it that would benefit the children of his district.”

Furthermore, Pritchett believed that working together for the good of the district and trying to find “our own roadmaps to the implementation of *A Plus* strengthened his relationships with his principals.” But, Pritchett, too, was quick to add: “the way that I work with them has not changed, not really has there been any changes on my part of theirs.” It is noteworthy to report that both superintendents adamantly agreed that the *A Plus Reform Act of 2000* had not had a negative impact on the relationships between them and their principals.
Section Summary

Both superintendents in this study were to the point and absolute in reporting that there were not any negative effects on their relationships with their principals due to the A Plus Reform Act of 2000. Both Dr. Hardy and Dr. Pritchett believed that the “hurdles to overcome” to implement the law in their districts, strengthened their relationships with their principals. Moreover, both Hardy and Pritchett reported that working cooperatively with principals aligned the work that principals did at the site to and with the vision of the district and their superintendents.

Each superintendent also viewed the fact that they had been a teacher, principal and central office administrator in the same district they now serve as superintendent as a key to the strong relationships that have with their principals and others in the school community. Both knew the strengths and weaknesses of their principals prior to becoming superintendents. Also, each knew the culture and expectations of the community prior to becoming superintendent.

Division of Responsibilities

Question three of this study sought to uncover the impact the A Plus Reform Act of 2000 had on the superintendent’s work in the area of division of responsibilities. Figure 4.11 provides an overview of the theme related to the division of responsibility and the perspective that emerged, Central Office administrators play a key role in implementing the A Plus Reform Act.
Figure 4.11 Perspective: Central Office administrators play a key role in implementing the *A Plus Reform Act*.

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<th>Theme</th>
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<td>Division of Responsibilities related the <em>A Plus Reform Act of 2000</em></td>
<td>Central office roles: Planning, Implementation, Communicating with principals</td>
<td>Central Office administrators play a key role in implementing the <em>A Plus Reform Act</em>.</td>
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Essentially, the division of responsibilities focused on the duties and responsibilities of the central office staffs related to the work the superintendents in this study delegated to them while implementing the provisions of the *A Plus Reform Act of 2000*. The work of the superintendents were so encompassing and varied that they, alone, could not implement the mandates of the *A Plus Reform Act of 2000*. The superintendents in this study took the lead in its implementation; however, they depended greatly on the central office staff to see to the day-to-day activities needed to implement the provisions of *A Plus Reform Act of 2000*. According to Leithwood (1995), “In the work of the superintendent, he/she is far removed from the classroom, [and] the functions of instructional leadership are carried out by others” (p. 2).

In this study, the superintendents undertook the role of the leader of this reform effort; however, the central office staffs were responsible for making sure that all components were in place at the school sites. Superintendents traditionally have worked with central office administrators as the “middlemen” of district administration to school sites, according to Doyle (1998). Essentially, both Hardy and Pritchett reported the division of responsibility at the central office spanned strategies: planning, implementing, and communicating.
Planning for A Plus Implementation at the Central Office Level

Adjustments had to be made at the central office level to carry out the mandates of the A Plus Reform Act of 2000. According to Dr. Hardy, “What A Plus has done is that it has created a lot of trying to fit our square peg into their round hole.” Hardy further stated, “It has more than quadrupled county procedures that we have had to do in terms of fitting what we do into the way that the state is trying to fund it.”

Dr. Pritchett agreed that planning and organizing was a top priority to determine just what this “massive piece of legislation entailed.” Dr. Pritchett reported taking the 187-page document, and “placing tabs throughout according to which division of central office it affected.” According to Dr. Pritchett, “We started delving into the law, and we took it and dissected it and looked at all the different areas to which individual central office departments would fit.” Pritchett further related that, “procedure and protocol had to be established. A plan of action had to be set in place. The people at central office had to be the first to fully understand its meaning”. Dr. Pritchett further elaborated:

I sent a memo out in July with a summary of some of the major areas in the Bill with a central office person’s name beside the area, and who would have primary responsibility for insuring the implementation of that component. We took the approach like eating an elephant – one bite at a time. We wanted to be sure that our principals did not feel overwhelmed by this mammoth Bill. It is ultimately my responsibility to have one clear understanding of all the components of A Plus and to ensure that we are the support for the schools to implement it.

Implementation of A Plus From the Central Office

The central offices of each school district were the “nerve centers” for the implementation of the A Plus Reform Act of 2000. The volume of changes and the implications for the law had to be directed from one central point to insure that all schools were carrying out the law. Principals in schools were too busy carrying out the
daily duties of running schools to individually understand all components of the law. Central office staffs had to take the lead and provide direction; however, the two superintendents had differing viewpoints on how much the *A Plus Reform Act of 2000* changed the roles of their central office staffs.

According to both superintendents, departments within the central offices not only disseminated information but also they had to monitor the implementation. Dr. Pritchett provided an example, detailing:

> Our Curriculum and Instruction Department must insure that all our principals understand and adhere to class size requirements. They must try to make sure that the new requirements do not necessitate more administrative or clerical duties on our schools. A Plus affected our personnel department. It changed certification criteria for middle school teachers. We told our principals that we would take care of that at the central office level.

While the *A Plus Reform act of 2000* certainly impacted schools by creating accountability for student achievement, reduction in class sizes, and the formation of school councils, Dr. Hardy found that the major impact of *A Plus* was on budget and finance, and he stated:

> We have had to focus mostly on how to deal with the budget, and the shortfalls we continue to have from the state level. How we do our bookkeeping has been the biggest change of all. How we account for the money with all the new accounts and dispersion of funds to the schools has had a big impact on us. Other than that, *A Plus* has not affected the role of central office staff.

In Dr. Pritchett’s school system, the central office staff now used state mandated test results to help to guide and to direct curricular and instructional programs, and he further explained:

> This data has provided information to determine if there are gaps in the curriculum or the instructional programs. The new law has also allowed the district to look at uniformity in programs provided in the school district resulting in more district-wide consistency.
Central Office Communicating With Principals

Effective communication of system procedures for carrying out the *A Plus Reform Act of 2000* was very important to each superintendent. While each superintendent believed they were “accessible” to their principals, each also stated that principals should “call first line people at central office to answer their questions,” Hardy asserted. According to Kowalski (1995), superintendents most often communicate with deputies, associates, and assistants, who in turn communicate more directly with site level administrators (p.96).

Dr. Pritchett pointed out that he wanted to be sure “that principals in the schools could depend on the people in central office to answer their questions” as his accessibility to principals was “often limited due to the myriad duties he had working with the board of education.” Pritchett also wanted to avoid the perception that “the right hand did not know what the left hand was doing” in the central office. Pritchett wanted “communication coming from the central office staff to be one of support.”

Although each superintendent reported being accessible to their principals, they reported that there was a chain of command in place. According to Dr. Pritchett, “just because I am their direct supervisor, I am not the only one they are to call, and they know who in central office is responsible for various functions, and they need to call them first.” According to Dr. Hardy, “Operational issues for *A Plus* are handled by the operations people here at central office, and my principals need to always call them first.”

Each superintendent also discussed the dilemma of making sure that all principals receive and fully understand information presented to them in such a way that the principal can keep teachers, parents, and students “informed of changes resulting from
the provisions of the *A Plus Reform Act of 2000.*” Dr. Pritchett gave this as an example of “chain of command communication:”

Here is the new promotion and placement of student regulations. We had our Assistant Superintendent and Director of Student Services, as well as curriculum coordinators attend that workshop. Now they will take that information and present it to the principals. If necessary, they will go into the schools themselves. We need to be willing to be more direct with a broader audience than just principals sometimes to make sure that all get the message.

Dr. Hardy was more direct in his view of information being relayed to teachers from principals. He stated:

> When we are communicating with a principal, expecting that principal to communicate with everybody else that works under him or her, that will never work. Central office staff has to e-mail some of the other people. You have to send copies of what you gave the principal. Central office has to go out and speak to a group of teachers if you want them to get the message. The principal will never deliver it in the fashion you hope it was to be delivered.

**Section Summary**

Planning for and implementing such a massive educational reform as the *A Plus Reform Act of 2000* began with the superintendent and central office staffs at both districts. Coordination of planning, implementation, as well as communication of expectations of the new law originated with this group of central administrators.

Alignment of duties within the central offices of these districts was necessary in order to meet the demand of new mandates. Determining who was responsible for specific areas of the law ensued. Protocol and procedure was established to communicate the law to principals.

Principals were involved in planning for the implementation of the *A Plus Reform Act of 2000* in each district; however, due to the volume of changes, most procedures for implementation were handled from the central offices of these two districts. While
principals were a part of the process of implementing the provisions of A Plus, the busy and varied nature of their jobs made it essential for others, most notably, other central level administrators, to assist the principals understand the provisions of the A Plus Education Reform Act 2000. Both superintendents understood that their principals, alone, could not be responsible to know all of language and aspects of the mandate. Both superintendents found that central office specialists, as well as principals, have worked together to use the law’s resulting data to help enhance their curricular and instructional programs.

Effective communication of the mandates of the A Plus Reform Act 2000 was an important issue to both Dr. Hardy and Dr. Pritchett. Both described themselves as accessible to their principals; however, they avoided micromanaging principals’ affairs. Each described the chain of command for communication as well as the sometimes inefficiency in district communication. Each superintendent viewed, as important, that central office staff communicates directly with teachers and others to ensure effective communication.

Chapter Summary

Both superintendents in this study concluded that the A Plus Reform Act of 2000 was a reform measure that was “thrust on” their school districts with little guidance for its implementation. The law included many mandates that were left to interpretation; yet, these mandates had great impact on their districts. Accountability for student achievement was an integral part of the law that rested with the performance of building principals.
Communicating high expectations to principals was found to be an important factor in this study. It was found to be the guide for success in all aspects of the new law. Each participant viewed effective communication as one of the most important factors of their work with principals. Communicating clearly what was expected helped these two superintendents effectively implement the mandates of the *A Plus Reform Act of 2000*.

Both superintendents credited the *A Plus Reform Act of 2000* with allowing the relationships between themselves and their principals to become stronger. Each participant actively involved their principals in the decision making process for how to implement the law at each site level. The ownership of the principals in this process forged more productive relationships between the superintendents and their principals.

Each superintendent described their methods for communicating expectations to their principals. Both held monthly sessions with their principals to share information and to promote dialogue between them and other principals. Each superintendent was adamant that there was no question that their principals clearly understood the expectations that they, as superintendents, expected from them with regard to the *A Plus Reform Act of 2000*.

Accountability as a result of the *A Plus Reform Act of 2000* had minimal effect on the principals. Each superintendent indicated that many of the things they already had in place before the law held high expectations for achievement and high performing schools.

There were differing methods for evaluating the performance of principals. Dr. Hardy relied on a formative and summative approach to evaluation. This method is a standard procedure for administrative evaluations in the state of Georgia. Dr. Pritchett
had just introduced the “balanced scorecard” method of evaluation. This method was based on measurable performance indicators for the schools and their principals and, moreover, for the system.

Informal evaluation of principals was an important aspect of formative evaluation. Although it was hard to quantify, informal evaluations played a large part in determining principal effectiveness, and each superintendent described visiting the campuses and interacting personally with principals as extremely important. Dr. Hardy viewed ongoing evaluation, both formative and summative, as a non-negotiable activity that must be done. Dr. Pritchett also viewed these processes as just as important, however, and he openly reported not having enough time to accomplish this goal to his own satisfaction. Both Dr. Hardy and Dr. Pritchett stressed that the new law had no adverse effect on their relationships with their principals. Each felt that due to having to “work through” the implementation of the law brought them and their principals closer together as a system-wide team.

The *A Plus Reform Act of 2000* created a need for a greater clarification of the division of responsibilities at the Central Offices of each district. While the principals dealt with the daily running of their schools, the central office staffs were responsible for seeing that all components of the law were being met at the site-level. Effective planning and organizing was important to implement the various components of the law. Dr. Pritchett view was that the law’s components were delegated to the different divisions of the central administration. Dr. Hardy’s view was that the greatest impact at the central office was on budgeting and finance.
Both superintendents described the role of central office in communicating to principals. While the superintendents viewed themselves as accessible to school leadership, both agreed to the importance of not micromanaging the affairs of the principals and their schools. Both described a chain of command as necessary and for principals to both use and understand this chain of command.

Effective communication involved principals clearly understanding the messages as they were intended. Both participants felt that this was a dilemma. Each described cases in which central office had to explain things to teachers that were not as well communicated by principals. Each blamed the hectic pace of the work of the principal for this these problems in communicating the provisions of the *A Plus Reform Act of 2000* to teachers, parents, and students.
CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This qualitative case study examined the perspectives of two superintendents specifically relating to the relationships between them and their building level principals in light of the *A Plus Reform Act of 2000*. The participants’ descriptions of the aspects of these relationships provided the data for this study. This chapter presents a summary of the findings and a discussion of the findings, implications of the finding, and recommendations for further study.

Summary of the Study

The following questions were used to direct this study.

1. What is the influence of the *A Plus Reform Act of 2000* on the superintendent’s work in the area of accountability for principals?

2. How do superintendents view their relationship with principals given the mandates that must now be implemented to comply with the *A Plus Reform Act of 2000*?

3. What is the impact of the *A Plus Reform Act of 2000* on the superintendent’s work in the area of division of responsibilities?

Methodology

A qualitative case study was conducted using semi-structured interviews with two superintendents from mid-sized school districts in Georgia. Data included interview transcripts, fieldnotes, and relevant artifacts. The unit of analysis was the constant comparative method in which the researcher compared data across interviews, reduced
data according to themes, and then developed perspectives based on the analysis of data. Moreover, the researcher offered the participants the opportunity to examine transcripts and to add additional information to extend or complete an idea expressed in earlier interviews.

Limitations
Since the superintendents in this study had prior professional and working relationships with their principals, one must wonder if any of the findings in this study would have been different if the superintendents had not been “groomed” from within the district. With effective communication as such a vital theme in this study, it would be noteworthy to research the relationships between superintendents and principals without such familiarity and history.

This study was limited to a small sample. Therefore, findings were not generalizable to other districts. It is suggested that multiple case studies be conducted to determine relationships between superintendents and principals in districts that are not alike—urban and rural districts.

Finally, this study focused only on the perspectives of two superintendents. The perspectives of their principals were not examined. Thus, research should be conducted to determine if significant differences exist between the perspectives of superintendents and the perspectives of their principals concerning their relationships as they implement reform mandates.
Participants

The two superintendents for this study, Dr. Thomas Hardy of the Alexander County School District and Dr. Richard Pritchett of the Calloway County School District, had both been teachers and then administrators in the state of Georgia. They had experiences only in Georgia and had not been involved in previous reform efforts in other states. Each was a superintendent of a mid-sized school district in Georgia for two years prior to this study.

Summary of the Findings

This study was based on three overarching research questions, which examined the perspectives of superintendents. These perspectives were related to what impact that the *A Plus Reform Act of 2000* had in the areas of accountability for principals, affect on superintendent-principal relationships, and division of responsibilities in the districts.

Question 1 sought to gain perspectives of how the new law influenced the work of these superintendents in holding principals accountable within these two districts. It was found that the participants in this study viewed the accountability of principals as just one of a multitude of mandates in the new law. Each held principals accountable for student achievement. However, they felt that their principals were held accountable prior to the enactment of the law. Both superintendents had methods in place to measure principal success well before it was mandated by the state of Georgia. From the interviews, it was evident that even though the new law focused on increased accountability, each superintendent was absolute that high standards of accountability already existed within their systems.
Although superintendents reported that they evaluated principals formally, Dr. Pritchett’s district specific “scorecard” evaluation provided measurable indicators that held principals accountable for the goals of the district, site-level goals for school improvement, and the activities and initiatives that each principal used to meet goals. Moreover, Pritchett met formally twice a year with each principal for the purpose of “continuously seeing who was making progress” in achieving goals. Whereas, Dr. Hardy used the standard state-required approach, which was to use the formative evaluation to establish goals and the summative evaluation to measure the achievement of these goals. To this end, both used the formal evaluation as the basis for school and district improvement.

Informal evaluation was found to be important to both superintendents. However, Dr. Hardy made the commitment and followed through on visiting his school sites monthly for informal gathering of information as well as to develop relationships with his principals. Dr. Pritchett, on the other hand, viewed this as very important but simply could not find the time to visit, as he would have liked due to the vast obligations in his job.

Each superintendent held and communicated high expectations to their principals. From the interviews, it was evident that even though the new law focused on increased accountability, each superintendent was absolute that high standards of accountability already existed within their systems. Both communicated these expectations in similar ways. Their methods of communicating expectations throughout the year was found to include, planning sessions prior to the beginning of the school year, goal setting sessions for principals, written memos and directives, as well as monthly principals’ meetings.
It was discovered that the Report Card for Schools, which was a mandate of the *A Plus Reform Act of 2000*, did not affect these superintendents’ views toward principal accountability. To them, the Report Card did not tell these superintendents anything they did not already know. They viewed the Report Card as a communication vehicle of the state for the community.

Research Question 2 examined the impact that the *A Plus Reform Act of 2000* had on the relationships between superintendents and their principals from the perspectives of the superintendents. As described by these two superintendents, the *A Plus Reform Act of 2000* had little or no negative effect on their relationships with their principals. It was discovered that to some degree that the reform produced a more positive and open environment that enhanced the relationships between the two superintendents and their principals. The researcher found that the superintendents in this study would not elaborate in this area but simply perceived relationships between themselves and their principals as “good.”

Research question 3 addressed the division of responsibility as a result of the *A Plus Reform Act of 2000*. It was found that the superintendents were very knowledgeable about the content of the new law, but relied on administrators from the central office to make sure that the communication of the law as well as the implementation were done effectively. Interviews with the superintendents concluded that they depended on the central office administrators to work with principals within the specialties of the district office administrators.

It was found that the two superintendents had differing views on how much impact the *A Plus Reform Act of 2000* had on their central offices. While Dr. Pritchett
described the change as substantial, with central office administrators having to take on specific leadership roles within their scope of expertise, Dr. Hardy viewed that the greatest changes occurred in his Business Department. His other central office administrators continued their role of support to the schools just as they had prior to the law’s implementation.

Both superintendents believed that their principals were too busy in the day-to-day-running of their schools to know all the regulations of the new law. Division of responsibility resulted in a heavy dependence on central office to make sure the principals were equipped with the information necessary for successful implementation. Division of responsibility was found to be the result of the need for communication of the mandates to principals as well as assurance that the law being effectively implemented. Communication was found to be a focal point in carrying out this task.

While both superintendents believed that they were accessible perceptions to their principals, they relied heavily on the chain-of-command as well as the “foot soldiers” of central administration. These superintendents’ views were that the communication of these “foot soldiers” with the principals must be resoundingly effective. However, in reality, effective communication was lacking.

Each superintendent voiced their displeasure with principals not being able to take information given by central office and effectively communicates it to their teachers. Again, the busy nature of the job of principal was blamed as the reason for this inadequacy. Both superintendents described incidents where they did not rely on their principals to give critical information, but opted to send central office administrators to the schools to “tell teachers first-hand.”
Discussion

What emerged from this study were four prevalent perspectives related to these superintendents. The four perspectives are:

1. One primary function of the superintendent is to be a communicator.
2. High expectations set by the superintendent provide the mechanism for formal and informal evaluations of principals.
3. Regardless of state mandated reform, relationships between the superintendent and their principals are neither made nor broken as a result of legislated mandates.
4. Central Office administrators play a key role in implementing the *A Plus Reform Act of 2000*.

The purpose of this section is to discuss the major findings in this study in relation to the literature in Chapter 2. Each section below includes a prevalent perspective derived from the findings of this study and the relationship of these perspectives to the literature reported in Chapter 2, Review of the Related Literature.

**Perspective 1: One primary function of the superintendent is to be a communicator.**

The overriding theme in the findings of this study was the importance of communication. Both superintendents expressed that communication is the “greatest aspect” of their jobs. Dr. Pritchett said, “The superintendent is the one who paints and communicates the vision of where the district wants to go and how to get there.” Each superintendent described the enormous amount of time in which they simply communicate with others. Communication took the form of communicating with the Board of Education, the public, external constituents, central office staff, principals, parents, and teachers. Much of their time was consumed with meeting with people.
Sharp and Walter (1997) reported that superintendents, “spend 80% of their time talking with others,” and that, “their activities are largely deskwork, phone calls, and meetings” (p. 47). Both superintendents in this study viewed their ability to be a good communicator a determining factor to their success as the leader of their school district.

Both participants in this study described how communication takes away their time for other important issues by asserting that there are many days in which they spend the entire day communicating only with members of the Board of Education. Dr. Hardy expressed, “when you are an assistant superintendent you are isolated from the Board, but when you are the superintendent, you spend a tremendous amount of time communicating with the Board.” Both Hardy and Pritchett reported that effective communication with this group is the cornerstone for superintendent and district success. Norton et al., (1996) reiterated, “This relationship does more to determine the quality of education in a district than any other single factor” (p. 34).

Public support for education in a school district depends largely on effective communication from the superintendent. Especially today with public criticism of the educational system and the cry for reform of public education, the public is much more astute at casting a critical eye on school performance. The superintendent must garner the support from the public. Communication is the key. Listening to the cultural needs of the community, understanding community expectations for school system performance, and developing a forum for dialogue with all these groups greatly enhances the ability of a superintendent to move a district forward (Carter & Cunningham, 1997; Norton et al., 1996; Sharp & Walker, 1997).
Dr. Hardy expressed, “you have to have a link to the business community, all the different civic organizations, churches, and pastors,” and he added, “they all want to talk to you about their ideas which leaves less time for your staff.” Dr. Pritchett explained, “you have to understand how your school system fits into the overall county organization,” and he further elaborated, “they point to the school system as being one of the most critical factors in the development of our community.” According to Norton et al., (1996), “The superintendent has an opportunity to form linkages with the community, ask questions and obtain community perceptions,” and, “He/she should listen, observe, and look for common themes that arise from various community groups.” (p. 338)

Dr. Hardy and Dr. Pritchett provided examples of the importance of communicating with the various external agencies within their districts. Both described that education is not the “self-contained service” it once was. Each discussed that relationships with agencies outside the school district are essential in addressing the varied needs of their student populations.

Two-way communication with principals and the superintendent and the principal and central office was stressed as important; however, each superintendent expressed frustration that they did not have the time to communicate and interact with their principals on a regular basis. In fact, Dr. Pritchett’s assessment of his ability spend time was telling, and he indicated, “I would give myself an ‘A’ for effort for wanting to get into schools but an ‘F’ for actually having the time to do it.

Communication of expectations for implementing reform mandates must be clearly communicated to principals and teachers by the superintendent. Due to the nature of the job, the superintendent does not have ongoing, direct contact with the principals or
teachers; therefore, the superintendent must lead from a distance while depending on principals to do their jobs of carrying out the reform law effectively. On this point, Dr. Pritchett said, “many of my duties and responsibilities have taken me further away from the schools and classrooms.” According to Dr. Hardy, “It is essential that I communicate clearly through monthly principal meetings, working with principals closely, as well as involving them in our committees and planning.” Dr. Pritchett added, “I am very direct with my expectations to my principals, but I also have high expectations for myself, so I try to model for them.”

Superintendents today are taking on the role more of facilitator. According to Leithwood (1995), “In the work of the superintendent, he/she is far removed from the classroom, [and] the functions of instructional leadership are carried out by others” (p. 2). Moreover, Carter and Cunningham (1997) stated, “the role of the superintendent is changing to enabler/facilitator-which includes serving as the organizer and facilitator of information rather than the source of knowledge” (p. 172). Each participant in this study went to great length discussing the importance of effectively getting the correct message to those responsible for implementing the new law. Dr. Pritchett explained, “Planning for our balanced scorecard is a good example of guiding principals toward a common goal where the principals actually put in place the standards and indicators they were to follow.” Dr. Hardy countered, “communication is so important, but it is equally important to listen more than you speak.”
**Perspective 2:** *High expectations set by the superintendent provide the mechanism for formal and informal evaluation of principals.*

Superintendents assume ultimate responsibility for the success of the entire school district. Effectively communicating and assessing high expectations for principal performance is pivotal for superintendent and school district success. Johnson (1996) reported that, “the principal, because he/she is in regular contact with teachers and students, has the most direct and profound influence on school practice” and that “superintendents should supervise as well as evaluate principals directly, providing them with complete and accurate information about the superintendent’s priorities and expectations.” (p. 265)

Both Dr. Hardy and Dr. Pritchett believed that communicating high expectations is bedrock to their philosophy of leadership. Both provided many examples of the relationship of expectations to performance. Each felt that much of the success of their districts was due to these high expectations. Expectations for principal performance are incorporated into the evaluation process of a principal. Each participant in this study described that mutually agreed on expectations was a measurable indicator in the principals’ yearly formal evaluation. Each district’s formal evaluation process was based on measurable objectives in which the principals had input. Each superintendent also described other factors that were not quantifiable but that were included in a principal’s evaluation. Dr. Pritchett described, “I can gain a lot of insight about the performance of a principal by just visiting a school and walking around.” Dr. Hardy explained, “I make it a point to set up a schedule so that I am able to visit schools and see for myself what is going on as well as having direct interaction with my principals.”
Davis and Hensley (1999) noted the difficulty of evaluating principals by surmising, “the task of evaluating a principal’s performance is much more difficult than that of evaluating a teacher,” and added, “principal assessment must be based on activities, decisions and behaviors that are weighed against an ever-changing array of situational variables” (p. 22). Thus, superintendents must rely not only on the formal evaluation process to determine principal success but they must also incorporate informal ways to evaluate principals.

There is little research to support the poorly defined method of informal evaluation of principals (Moore, 2001). While it is evident that superintendents monitor principal job performance informally through observation, personal interaction, and indicators of satisfaction of teachers, parents, and students, it is difficult for superintendents to quantify this approach to evaluation. There are no clear indicators of measurement, and tangible evidence is often lacking. However, in this study, superintendents viewed it as important that they informally evaluate their principals, and Dr. Hardy stated, “visiting the schools and having “one-on-one discussions.” These superintendents described the results of informal evaluations in sensory terms. They described feelings and perceptions gained from their principals as a result of this process.

While both superintendents viewed principal evaluation as important, time was an obstacle in carrying this out. Both admitted that as a result, the formal evaluation was the crucial aspect of measuring principal performance and the meeting of superintendent expectations. Dr. Pritchett developed a method to do this, the scorecard in which he and each principal could track progress toward goal achievement.
**Perspective 3:** Regardless of state mandated reform, relationships between the superintendent and their principals are neither made nor broken as a result of legislated mandates.

The relationship between superintendents and their principals are, in practice, an unarguably key component in effectively carrying out the mission of the superintendent, and by extension, the school district. However, there is virtually no research available relating this important component to reform. The researcher searched for empirical studies on the relationship the superintendent and site-level administrators and found none. Scant literature was found through journals and professional organizations. Textbooks used in the preparation courses for the superintendency were consulted and approximately 12 pages in 13 books covering this topic were found. Moreover, the information presented in these books was ‘best practice’ descriptions, devoid of empirical research.

Just as there is very little published information available on these relationships, little information of significance was gleamed from the two participating superintendents in this study. Each felt that they had good relations with their principals prior to and during the *A Plus Reform Act of 2000*. This was based totally on their perspectives. The perspectives of others (principals, other central administrators) were out of the scope of this study. A caveat to this finding is in order, however, in that the selection criteria was designed to find a pool of possible subjects for this research who had not had experience with reform the magnitude of the *A Plus Reform Act of 2000* and superintendents who were not native to Georgia were eliminated from the pool.
The researcher purposely wanted to exclude the perspectives of superintendents who had experience implementing large-scale reform as in the case of the *A Plus Reform Act of 2000*. Moreover, the two subjects of this study, although they had extensive administrative experience prior to assuming the superintendency, had only two years of experience as a superintendent. These two factors might have impacted the perspectives of the superintendents who participated in this research. To this end, the selection criteria could have been a limitation.

Each participant believed that the reason for good relationships was that both had served their careers in the existing school district and knew their principals prior to obtaining the superintendency. Dr. Pritchett stated, “My principals feel I understand them because they know that I have walked in their shoes.” Perhaps, the long-term familiarity with the principals in the district skewed the responses of the two superintendents. They knew the strengths and weakness of their principals, and, in turn, the principals and their superintendents had familiarity with one another. To the superintendents, they believed that this familiarity fortified their relationships with their principals.

Both superintendents in this study viewed the impact the *A Plus Reform Act of 2000* as negligible on their relationships with their principals as well as holding principals accountable. Each felt that they had high expectations for performance in place prior to the enactment of the law and that had not changed. According to Dr. Hardy, “we already had a lot of the things that were in *A Plus* before the law ever came out, and it really has not had an effect on us much.”
Working together to establish procedures for the implementation of the new law required the superintendents to involve their principals “more than had been the case in the past.” According to the superintendents, involving their principals in the planning and organizing necessary to implement the provisions of the *A Plus Reform Act of 2000* nurtured principal ownership in the process. Both agreed that the involvement of the principals “in all aspects of *A Plus,*” if anything, possibly strengthened their relationships with their principals. Dr. Pritchett stated, “Working together on committees to plan for the law may have resulted is us having stronger relationships.”

Each superintendent would not expound very much or at length when probed during questioning about their relationships with their principals. They were, however, very direct in saying that there had been “No effect” on their relationships with principals.

**Perspective 4: Central Office administrators play a key role in implementing the A Plus Reform Act.**

A superintendent cannot plan for and implement reform mandates for an entire district alone. While it is important that the superintendent thoroughly understands the law, many times it is the central office administrators that are in the field working with principals concerning specifics for implementation.

Due to the nature and complexity of their jobs, superintendents are mostly removed from frequent contact with the schools. The responsibility to communicate with principals most often lies with central office administrators. Superintendents traditionally have worked with central office administrators as the “middlemen” of district
administration to school sites (Doyle, 1998). According to Dr Pritchett, “the role of the superintendent in part is to be the orchestrator of the departments of the school district.”

Both superintendents in this study recognized the importance of initial planning for the A Plus Reform Act of 2000. Dr. Pritchett illustrated the importance of central office staff in this endeavor by saying, “I took the law and put a central office person’s name beside the area with who would have primary responsibility for insuring implementation of that component.”

In this study, central office staffs played an important role in making sure the A Plus Reform Act of 2000 was being implemented correctly throughout the district. An example of this according to Dr. Hardy was, “my school improvement person from central office meets with principals to make sure they are doing the accountability component correctly at the school level.” According to Carter and Cunningham (1997), “reform movements have forced central office administrators to move away from the role of regulator, and more forward as a service provider for schools.” (p. 169). Due to the volume of changes in the way the districts had to do business under the new law, it was natural that the central offices of these districts led the initiative. Hallett (1995) recognized the importance of central office staffs working with schools and concluded, “by existing only to serve school needs, central office departments will perform useful services to enhance schools.” (p. 20)

Effective communication of the components of the law as well as how to correctly implement them rested primarily with central office staffs in this study. While each superintendent believed they were accessible, the chain of command for day-to-day operations was primarily responsible for the law’s success in their districts. According to
Kowalski (1995), “superintendents must most often communicate with deputies, associates, and assistants, who in turn communicate more directly with site level administrators” (p. 96). According to Dr. Pritchett, “I must ensure that we have a department at the central office that will be the primary contact as the implementation actually occurs at the school level.” Both Dr. Hardy and Dr. Pritchett, however, expressed concern over communication effectively filtering through principals to the teachers in the classroom.

Implications

The participants in this study described the effect of the A Plus Reform Act of 2000 on their relations with their principals. The study was limited to two mid-sized school districts in Georgia. Given the small sample size, implications are not intended to be generalized across larger populations. The findings are intended to be representative of the two superintendents and their districts. These findings do have implications for (a) colleges and universities who train superintendents, (b) practicing superintendents, and (c) researchers.

College and University Programs for Superintendents

Colleges and Universities have the responsibility for equipping superintendents of the future with the necessary tools to lead school districts in this age of educational reform. Superintendents of today and the future must be prepared to face reform and accountability, and one way to do this is through professional development.

Professional development programs for aspiring superintendents should focus on the real-life experiences of the superintendent. It is suggested that various superintendents from around the state work with this program as visiting lecturers to
provide first-hand knowledge, establish scenarios, and give an up close and personal context of what the job really entails.

An implication for colleges and universities is the need for a course in which prospective superintendents learn and demonstrate processes for “thinking outside the box” of conventional wisdom. Superintendents today must look for nontraditional methods of doing business. This includes everything from instruction to budget.

The rapid changes in education force superintendents to think differently from their predecessors. This “think tank” course would help participants too look at problems differently as well as how they can develop into “cutting edge” superintendents.

**Practicing Superintendents**

Success of superintendents is dependent to a large extent on the effectiveness of their principals. Communicating high expectations and then holding principals quantifiably accountable for achieving these expectations is an implication of this study for practicing superintendents.

Evaluations of principals are based on informal observations of principals at meetings, through walk-throughs of their buildings, and the formal evaluation process. Superintendents must be able to “tie” these processes together in a consistent way to evaluate all aspects of their building-level leadership.

Practicing superintendents can take from this study how to continuously intertwine informal evaluation in the work of both supervising and evaluating principals. However, they must provide a structured approach to this evaluation by means such as the “scorecard” used in the Calloway School District. Superintendents should develop
evaluative criteria that can measure the informal as well as formal aspects of their observations of principals’ work.

Superintendents can gleam from this study that although time is a premium in the superintendency, superintendents must spend more time in the buildings of their principals. Even though superintendents delegate, it does not free them up enough to go into the schools of their district. Superintendents must develop a strategic plan for delegating duties and the follow-through with seeing first-hand the work of the principal.

Superintendents in this study gave their perspectives of their relationships with their principals. The perspectives of principals were not studied. To distinguish between perception and reality, superintendents should anonymously survey their principals to obtain a clearer picture of how principals perceive their relationships with their superintendents. From this data, superintendents can have the “real” picture and if necessary, can take steps to improve relations with principals.

Researchers

The purpose of this study was to examine the perspectives of two superintendents from mid-sized counties in Georgia as they worked with site level principals in light of the legislated mandates of the Georgia A Plus Reform Act of 2000. The nature of the study and the limited context of the topic suggested that additional research was needed in three areas. First, research should be conducted to examine the impact of relations for those superintendents who are new to a district and did not previously know the principals. Second, research should be conducted to examine the impact on relations between two very different type districts, such as urban and rural. Third, research should
be conducted to study the perspectives of the principals and their views of the
relationships with their superintendents while implementing reform mandates.

**Concluding Thoughts**

There is very little research on the day-to-day work of the superintendent and the
relationships of superintendents with their principals. Finite research exists examining
the impact of educational reform on the relationships between superintendents and
principals. This study sought to examine the perspectives of two superintendents as they
described the impact of implementing reform mandates on their relationships with their
principals.

The participants in this case study of two superintendents illustrated that the *A
Plus Reform Act of 2000* had little to no effect on either accountability or their
relationships with their principals. Both superintendents exhibited a strong sense of
ownership in the vision for high expectations for achievement.

Perspectives were developed to discuss the major findings in this study in relation
to the literature. Perspectives that were developed included: 1) One primary function of
the superintendent is to be a communicator, 2) High expectations set by the
superintendent provide the mechanism for formal and informal evaluation of principals,
3) Regardless of state mandated reform, relationships between the superintendent and
their principals are neither made nor broken as a result of legislated mandates, and 4)
Central Office administrators play a key role in implementing the *A Plus
Reform Act*. 
Key to the future of education is strong visionary leadership in the superintendency. A visionary superintendent is one who can put in place the goals of a great vision and who can develop principals who share in the work to achieve the vision.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Interview 1

1. Tell me about your job as a superintendent.
2. Tell me about your work as a superintendent during the A Plus Reform Act.
3. How has your work changed since the inception of the A Plus Reform Act of 2000?
4. Describe your style with working with principals.
5. Has your working relationships with principals changed since the implementation of the A Plus Reform Act of 2000?
6. Please elaborate on the changes identified in number 3 above.
7. How do you get principals on the “same page” as the Board of Education? The district’s vision?
8. What strategies have you developed to communicate the expectations of the A Plus Reform Act of 2000 to principals?
9. How will you assess these strategies?
10. How often do you communicate directly with principals? Under what conditions? The forum for such interaction?

Interview 2

1. Tell me about your reflections, since the last time we talked about your job as a superintendent.
2. How do you communicate your expectations to principals?
3. Have the ways in which you communicate to principals changed since the inception of the A Plus Reform Act of 2000?
4. Please elaborate on the communication patterns identified in 3 above.
5. What are the most difficult aspects of working with principals? Communicating with principals?
6. Have you had to admonish principals for “not doing their jobs” as related to the A Plus Reform Act of 2000?
7. What was this like for you?
8. What types of “fall-out” occurred with other principals as a result of having to admonish a principal?
9. What strategies did you utilize to handle this “fall-out?”
SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS, Continued

Interview 3

1. Tell me about your reflections, since the last time we talked about your job as a superintendent.
2. How do principals communicate with you? Do principals have a direct line to you and your office?
3. What gets in the way of you communicating directly with principals?
4. How do you think principals would describe their interactions with you?
5. What if the expectations have been clearly established for school performance however it is evident that the principal is not performing?
6. Do you believe that the ways in which you communicate with principals will change if a principal is not meeting the “targeted” goals of the A Plus Reform Act of 2000?
7. Please elaborate on these changes.
8. Please share any lessons you have learned about communicating with principals and how these “new” lessons will be incorporated in practice in the future.
APPENDIX B

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

I agree to participate in the research entitled - Superintendents’ Perspectives of their Responsibilities to Ensure Principal Accountability in Light of the A Plus Reform Act of 2000 Across Two Mid-Size School Districts in Georgia, which is being conducted by Ronald J. Busbee, a doctoral student in the Program of Educational Leadership at the University of Georgia. I understand that this participation is entirely voluntary; I can withdraw my consent at any time without penalty and have the results of my participation, to the extent that it can be identified as mine, returned to me, removed from the research records and destroyed.

The literature on the relationships between superintendents and their site level principals is an area in the professional literature that is very sparse. The purpose of this research is to identify superintendents’ perspectives of this relationship in light of implementing the mandates of the A Plus Reform Act of 2000.

The researcher will conduct three interviews with the participant. Each interview will last approximately 60-90 minutes and will be conducted approximately six weeks apart. No discomforts or stresses are foreseen. No risks are foreseen. Any information the researcher obtains about me as a participant in this study, including my identity, will be held confidential. My identity will be coded, and all data will be kept in a secured, limited access location. My identity will not be revealed in any publication of the results of this research. The results of this participation will be confidential, and will not be released to any individually identifiable form without my prior consent unless otherwise required by law. The researcher will answer any questions about the research, now or during the course of the project, and can be reached by telephone at 478-960-7385. Dr. Sally J. Zepeda, Associate Professor of Educational Leadership is directing this research project and can be reached at 706-613-5245.

My signature below indicates that the researcher has answered all of my questions to my satisfaction and that I consent to volunteer for this study. I have been given a copy of this form. Please sign both copies of this form. Keep one and return the other to the researcher.

_________________________________________  ________________
Signature of Researcher.  Date

_________________________________________  ________________
Signature of Participant.  Date

Note: Research at the University of Georgia that involves human participants is overseen by the Institutional Review Board. For questions or problems about your rights, please call or write Dr. Christina Joseph, Human Subjects Office, University of Georgia,

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606A Boyd Graduate Studies Research Center, Athens, Georgia, 30602-7411. Telephone (706) 542-6514. E-Mail Address: [IRB@uga.edu](mailto:IRB@uga.edu)
APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW REFLECTION FORM

Interview Date ____________________ Participant ____________________

Today’s Date ___________

1. **Ideas heard during the interview**

2. **Information obtained related to questions**

3. **New questions to pursue with other contacts**

4. **Follow-up questions**
APPENDIX D
The Researcher’s Perspective

This study was developed based on my personal interest in accountability. I have always believed that accountability is not something forced upon us, but is a value that is instilled. All people should be held accountable for their actions, and even for their lack of action. Doing what is expected and doing it to the best of one’s ability should be a driving force for mankind. Sadly, that is not always the case.

In McGregor’s theory X and theory Y research, man is viewed either as inherently lazy and must be made to do, or man is viewed as one that is inherently good and strives to do well. I am a believer that from this, the reform movement was born.

Educators for the most part are hard working, dedicated professional people who deeply care for children and knowledge. Some people become content with the status quo and do not continually strive to be their very best. This is when the role of the leader must move to the forefront.

My belief is that the leader, whether it is the superintendent or the principal, has the responsibility to provide an environment that is both professionally challenging as well as rewarding for teachers. Creating a shared vision of excellence in all that is undertaken moves a system and school forward to new heights. A shared vision creates ownership for all involved. Goals may be out of reach but never out of sight.

Too many times educators have been their own worst enemy by being resistant to change. Change can be good. It can be invigorating and stimulating. Change for the good in education which includes better instructional practices, testing for value-added
education, increased instructional technology as a tool for learning, and being held accountable for your actions are long overdue.

The leaders’ role in accountability begins with clear and consistent expectations. Teachers will rise to the occasion when they fully understand what is expected. Teachers, like all other people, want to know the parameters, what constitutes a job well done, and what is considered a poor job. We project this philosophy to students all the time. It is also good for teachers.

I was able to open a new school as its principal five years ago. My bedrock philosophy was to establish very high standards for teachers as well as students. This accountability standard set the stage for success. The school was named the number one academic school in the 32 county region for my last three years at the school. Professionals thrived in this type of environment. Teachers found pride and satisfaction in their efforts. Students achieved to amazing heights in the district, and parents were moving to live within the school attendance zone.

Success does not come without pain and sacrifice. In the second year, I had to terminate a 16-year veteran teacher. This was the hardest thing I have ever done as a leader. The driving force in the decision was that this teacher was a detriment to children. The media as well as special interest groups exploited the firing. My own professional future seemed at risk as a result of the rhetoric. The Board of Education upheld her non-renewal. The State Board of Education upheld her non-renewal. The case eventually made its way to Superior Court. In all three instances, my decisions were upheld. This is a case of accountability in its highest form. Do we truly hold educators accountable or do
we just say we do? I did what I knew was right in my heart for my students and justice prevailed.

Healing had to take place, for the magnitude of such an event left scars. The third year was the first year that we were recognized for excellence. Many of the staff attributed our success to the fact that I would not accept mediocrity and had done what was right. Accountability became a value for all and not something that I forced upon them. We all grew tremendously from these experiences.

I believe that you usually hit the target you aim for. It the case of this school, the target was high, and the school believed in the abilities of its people to achieve. People believed they could achieve if the framework for success was in place and consistently followed. Status quo and excuse-based education was not accepted.

My goals now are to take the lessons learned, the successes of what really works in practice, and apply them to an entire school system. My goal is to be a superintendent in the future. I envision a system that is directed with the same type of enthusiasm for results. Accountability will be a major component of this goal.

It is my hope that this research study will enlighten others to the value of accountability. Accountability does not have to be forced upon us if we can hold ourselves and others accountable. Reform movements can help us to look into the mirror and analyze what we need to do better in order to provide a world-class education for all our children. These reform movements alone will not bring education to new heights. Success will occur only when we truly evaluate and measure what we are doing and continue with the courage to change and to hold ourselves and others accountable.