THE INFLUENCE OF FEDERALLY MANDATED POLICY ON EDUCATORS

A Thesis Submitted by

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In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education

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November 2014
Abstract

The researcher sought to explain how mandated federal policy that impacts education affects educators’ practice. Educators are often left out of the conversation when policy is determined however, they are often left with the task of implementation. Looking specifically at Florida’s adoption of the Common Core State Standards and changes to the state’s approach to teacher evaluation as a result of Race to the Top, the research design employed a qualitative case study. The Burke-Litwin Causal Model of Organizational Change was used to inform the design and analysis of the case study. The literature review analyzed reform efforts, both historically and currently, in addition to educators’ perspectives of mandated educational change. The research questions are as follows: (1) How do leaders and educators at a medium sized middle school in Central Florida perceive the positive and detrimental impact of federal and state mandated reforms? (2) In particular, how does the leadership and staff of Southview Middle School perceive the positive and deleterious impact of the most recent federal and state mandates to adopt the Common Core State Standards and engage in the Marzano teacher evaluation process? A case study was used to explore how educators at a medium-sized middle school in Central Florida are influenced by the reform efforts coming down at the federal level. It is evident that reform measure influence how educators work, impacting their time and approach to curriculum. Educators also feel that mandates are politically motivated often at the expense of students.

Keywords: Common Core State Standards, teacher evaluation, federal policy, No Child Left Behind and Race to the Top
Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my advisor, Dr. Chris Unger. His insight, support and dedication were instrumental to me. Dr. Unger, you remain a constant source of inspiration. I also want to thank my second reader Dr. Sara Ewell for your input and time.

I would also like to thank my friends and family that supported me throughout this journey. In particular, Elika Martinez-Evans, my original mentor. To my parents, Penny and James Vardas, thank you for being my biggest supporter and instilling in me a work ethic and drive that helped make this possible. To my sister Jessica, thank you for always making me laugh.
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Chapter I: Introduction

Problem of Practice

Change in education is inevitable. Over the past decade, teachers, schools and districts have been confronted with expectations of change, policy instructions, and policy demands, most of them justified by a concern with improving the quality of education (Ballet & Kelchterman, 2008). Fullan (1993) asserts that schools are expected to engage in a continuous renewal process brought on through reform efforts, and change expectations are continually descending on schools. As a result, individual schools are left to navigate through the mandates and comply with the changes brought on by policymakers. According to Phillips and Hughes (2012) the real challenge with the federal reform is for educators, not the policymakers. The challenges that educators face in the wake of continual reform aimed at improving education begin at the federal level trickling down to districts, schools and teachers. Throughout the past two decades educators have been faced with reform impacting everything from class-size to curriculum. Many of these reform efforts focus on testing and accountability which required educators to continuously change how they approach their daily practice. Recently many states adopted reform efforts linked to Race to the Top and were mandated to change state standards and approach to teacher evaluation.

Within the past thirty years education reform had impacted schools with efforts to desegregate schools with Brown vs. The Board of Education, provide equal opportunities to
English Language Learners with Lau vs. Nichols and address school prayer with Weiss vs. District Board. In addition, reform efforts have targeted class-size, accountability and promote a standards-based education. Current reform efforts began with the publication of A Nation at Risk (1983) sparking a new movement of school reform and with it a renewed concentration on educational accountability at the federal, state, and local levels. Concerns regarding students’ readiness to compete in a global market require states to adopt mandates that have jurisdiction over everything from curriculum standards to educator evaluations. Fleet and Wallace (2005) point out that government endeavors for school districts to increase student performance have resulted in states taking on a number of national reforms leading to increased accountability requirements for schools. Apple (2001) indicates that education reform over the last few decades is grounded on a market-based approach in an attempt to create a uniform system with more centralized authority. Spillane (2004) asserts that instructional policy reforms that target standards and assessment have gained popularity within the past two decades. As a result, educators have faced a barrage of change dictated by the federal government with little concerns over how it impacts their daily practice.

In Florida, over the past decade, the state has shifted from No Child Left Behind reform efforts to Race to the Top. The current Race to the Top reform efforts brought with it an onslaught of change affecting educators. In particular the state changed the state standards from the Sunshine State Standards to the Common Core primarily impacting state testing and requiring teachers to change their approach to curriculum. In addition, the state asked school districts to revamp how teachers are evaluated. Florida also decided to link a portion of teachers’
evaluations to student performance on state tests which are directly related to the new state standards.

On July 27, 2010, the Florida State Board of Education unanimously approved the adoption of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for English/Language Arts and Mathematics (Florida Department of Education). Postal (2012) notes that Florida is one of 46 states in addition to the District of Columbia that adopted the new standards and is now moving towards full implementation for the 2014-2015 academic year. The new Common Core State Standards replaces the old Sunshine State Standards that fell under the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001. Florida’s state Education Commissioner Tony Bennett proposed that the move to CCSS will, “transform the way students learn, teachers teach, and how we assess these two activities” (Jordan, 2013 para. 7).

One year later the Governor of Florida signed Senate Bill 736 into legislation that changes the evaluation process for Florida’s instructional and school-based administrative personnel (State Impact, 2013). Senate Bill 736 uses the Marzano Causal evaluation process to evaluate educators. Strauss (2012) points out the reform measure created a value added model (VAM) which ties 40% of a teachers’ evaluation to student performance on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test. The approach to the Marzano teacher evaluations is entrusted with the individual school districts. Blair (2012) posits that although the state provided a framework for the evaluations, districts had flexibility and developed their own scoring systems. Blair elaborates that this district flexibility resulted in wide district-by-district variations in the percentage of teachers deemed highly effective.
Statewide mandated changes in Florida have influenced how educators view their practice. Smith, Wilhelm and Fredrickson (2013) posit that the Common Core requires educators to take a firm look at their work and abandon the traditional approach to instruction. Groth & Bennett-Schmidt (2013) indicate that teachers are expected to deconstruct these new standards and investigate the vertical articulation. The state continues to send mixed-messages regarding the progress of these change efforts. When the writing portion of the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) was revamped to align with the rigor of the Common Core schools overwhelmingly failed and Florida had to scramble to make changes. Ehrenhalt (2013) states, “Florida had made some changes to its annual performance exam in the past year, mostly in the writing category, and the results weren’t pretty. If the numbers had been taken at face value, more than 130 schools would have received a failing grade. Nine of those schools would have dropped all the way from A to F” (para. 3).

Samples (2012) points out with the newly adopted Marzano evaluation system expects teachers to execute a process that is cumbersome and potentially damaging. Administrators are left to oversee this new evaluation process which stresses increased walk throughs that take away from their duties, while keeping staff educated on the new requirements. Samples (2012) also notes that in some Florida counties educators are scrambling to meet the deadlines for evaluating teachers, but they're using a new method that many don't feel sufficiently trained on. In an attempt to redesign how schools function through these mandated change efforts the state has imposed a compressed timeline for full implementation. The change efforts continue with little understanding as to how this affects the culture or climate within a school.
Southview Middle School (pseudonym) located in Central Florida is a high performing school in a high performing school district. Educators within the school are managing the recent changes to the evaluation system while preparing for full implementation of the Common Core State Standards for the 2014-2015 school year. Despite the influx of change Southview has maintained an “A” rating every year since it opened in the early 2000’s.

**Significance of the Research Problem**

The U.S. Department of Education (2014) defines the role of the federal government in education policy as primarily a State and local responsibility. It suggests that states and communities, as well as public and private organizations institute schools and colleges, develop curricula, and determine requirements for enrollment and graduation. However, over the last three decades districts and schools have been increasingly impacted by policy measures that occur at the federal level. As such, reform measures trickle down from the state, to school districts and then individual schools. It is the intent of these policies to improve education however; educators implementing these changes within a school are often left out of the conversation. What are teachers and administrators perceptions of these reform efforts and what is the positive or negative impact on their daily practice? Reform efforts are often perceived as being rolled out haphazardly with minimal thought in what it needed for successful implementation.

Florida, in particular, appears to be one state that rapidly implements educational change that is mandated at the federal level. Recent policies within the state such as Race to the Top and with it the Common Core standards created widespread changes within schools. New standards
within a state require a new set of state tests, updated curriculum and textbooks. Teachers require professional development on implementing these new standards in their classrooms. In addition, Florida’s Race to the Top efforts required districts revise how teachers were being evaluated. These changes appear innocuous however; the efforts impact educators’ curriculum, professional development, job security, school budgets and student achievement. Educators working in the schools affected by the reform have little input when it comes to reform but the changes have a direct effect on their practice. Oftentimes educators feel these changes are rapid and they are unprepared to implement. Critics argue that these reform models are often haphazardly implemented without fidelity and as a result reform does not allow the change necessary to impact student achievement.

O’Connor (2013) indicates that education reform in Florida mirror what is occurring on a national level. States have taken cues from the reform policies in Florida and began implementing similar change efforts. The national conversation has labeled these endeavors the Florida reform model. Goldstein (2013) stated, “Since 1999, Florida public schools have been turned into the equivalent of laboratory rats in the name of sweeping education reform” (para. 1). Schmoker (2012) argued that the level of reform implemented within the last few years in Florida is staggering and school districts are unaware of how these changes have influenced staff. Compounded with a new evaluation process that is described by Schmoker as an “unproven, hastily conceived innovation in the hope that it will improve school quality” (p. 70).

The entire purpose of reform should center on student achievement. Looking at the new
Common Core Standards Ravitch (2013) suggests that there is no evidence that the Common Core standards will enhance equity. Ravitch points to the Common Core tests in New York which caused a collapse in test scores, causing test scores across the state to plummet. Ravitch points out that only 31 percent of students passed these Common Core tests. Ravitch further explains that the failure rates were dramatic among the neediest students. Only 3.2 percent of English language learners were able to pass the new tests, along with only 5 percent of students with disabilities, and 17 percent of black students. The concern is that these tests scores might harm student achievement.

Educators are often left out of the reform conversation and as a result there is not a clear understanding of how the change is affecting them. Fullan (1993) posits that one of the main reasons that restructuring has failed so far is that there is no underlying conception that grounds what would happen within new structures. Donaldson (2013) suggests that despite growing momentum to reform teacher evaluation in order to increase its impact on teachers’ practice and persistence in the profession, very little research examines how current reforms influence teachers’ attitudes or reported instructional practices. Educators are also feeling the impact of implementing the new Common Core State Standards. An American Federation of Teachers (AFT) poll in 2013 stated out of the 800 teachers polled 57 percent feel their district is prepared to implement the new standards while 72 percent do not feel their districts have provided enough tools or resources for teachers to successfully teach the new Common Core State Standards (American Federation of Teachers, 2013).

**Positionality Statement**
The problem of practice the researcher selected involves educators’ perceptions of federally mandated educational initiatives. Fullan asserted that reform efforts have caused changes in participation, in governance, and in other formal aspects of the organization, but in the majority of cases, it has not involved the teaching-learning core and professional culture. The researcher’s interests included examining how federal education policy translates from the federal level to districts and schools. Using two recent federal mandates that took place within the state of Florida, the Common Core State Standards and the move many districts made to Marzano Causal evaluation system the goal is to use the initiatives to understand how educators’ process federally mandated change. First educators discussed past experiences with federally mandated educational change. The researcher aimed to determine how educators are working towards full implementation of these two initiatives and to what degree their work was influenced.

The research design included interviewing teachers and administrators and conducting focus group interviews allowing their perceptions to surface. The researcher sought to explore how they have begun implementing the Common Core State Standards, what type of trainings the district has provided and their perceptions of these trainings. Speaking to administrators and teachers, what effect did the new evaluation system have on their jobs, what type of trainings did the district provide and the perceptions of these trainings.

As a teacher there is a belief I hold that states have the tendency to adopt initiatives without fidelity leaving districts to hastily implement. Florida impetuously pushes federal policy
and the districts are left trying to navigate the implementation process. The researcher also supposed a level of bias because their job was influenced by these two initiatives.

Creswell (1998) explains within qualitative research the researcher approaches with a specific world view that guides inquiries. At the time of this study, I am a doctoral student, as well as a Language Arts teacher at a public school. When I entered the field of education in 2007 I had little knowledge of how federal policies impact education. Attending an educator program towards certification in 2006 I began to witness the hurdles in obtaining certification in part because of No Child Left Behind. I also noticed that no one spoke about the changes brought on by the state. Oftentimes the frustrations were directed solely at the school with little understanding of where the directives came from.

There was a realization within my first year of teaching that the state test, the FCAT, dictated how a school operated. Pressure from the test infiltrated how curriculum was approached and there was a need to justify lessons based on the standards that it covered. Students were bombarded with testing from reading tests, writing tests, science tests, math tests, quarterly benchmark exams and the state test. I was surprised how many weeks within a school year is set aside to simply test. After the testing teachers were required to pull data, create graphs and present their findings along with their plan to increase student achievement. Every year we were required to conduct Action Research based solely on student test scores with a goal of increasing student test scores. I would speak to veteran teachers who longed for the days that they had more control of their curriculum and were treated like a professional. Cohen and
Kottkamp (1993) discussed over two decades ago that “absence of teachers from the dialogue and decision-making on [educational] reform”, maintaining that “efforts to improve education are doomed to failure until teachers become respected partners in the process” (p. xvi). What needed to be addressed within the research is the voice of the veteran educators and with it an understanding of how reform has influenced their school.

In the past few years I have witnessed a barrage of reform efforts within the state that have consistently trickled down from the state. Teachers, in particular, have been negatively impacted by these efforts. Changes to the evaluation process were combined with one county challenging the state to publically release Value-Added-Model (VAM) scores in an effort to increase transparency. One question remains which is, “How has this impacted student achievement”? I find that state testing and the unyielding reform efforts tend to stand in the way of effective teaching. I understand that the purpose is to help students however I see gaps of knowledge as a result of this intense focus on state testing.

**Research Questions**

Reform efforts in Florida have required sweeping changes in everything from evaluations to the approach to instruction. Teachers are faced with a new set of standards that will change how they approach their curriculum and instruction. Teacher and administrators are required to implement a lengthy evaluation process that requires frequent administrative walkthroughs as well as lengthy conferences. As discussed, educators are left out of the conversation pertaining to reform that directly influences their work. In addition, Florida is known for quick implementation of sweeping educational reform that impacts educators across
the state. The purpose of this research design was to analyze the influence of mandated educational reform on a particular school setting. The research questions were designed to address the faculty within the school directly affected by the policy change.

1. How do leaders and educators at a medium-sized middle school in Central Florida perceive the positive and detrimental impact of federal and state mandated reforms?

2. In particular, how does the leadership and staff of Southview Middle School perceive the positive and deleterious impact of the most recent federal and state mandates to adopt the Common Core State Standards and engage in the Marzano teacher evaluation process?

**Theoretical Framework**

Organizational Change theory is used to inform the design and data analysis of this research study. The Causal Model of Organizational Performance and Change (the Burke-Litwin Model) provides a method of analysis on the power of mandated change within a school.

The Burke-Litwin Causal Model of Organizational Change was developed initially through the scholarship of George Litwin with the study of organizational climate (Litwin & Stringer, 1968). Litwin’s earlier empirically-tested model centered on organizational climate and open systems theory which included inputs (leadership style) and outputs (individual and organizational performance). The model was further developed in 1989 by Warren W. Burke and George Litwin and refined in 1992. Burke and Litwin (1992) acknowledged that with organizational change the “number of variables changing at the same time, the magnitude of environmental change, and frequent resistance of human systems create a whole confluence of processes that are extremely difficult to predict and almost impossible to control” (p.523).
The Burke-Litwin model was established to supply a causal framework that incorporates both the what and the how-what organizational dimensions are paramount to successful change and how those dimensions should be linked causally to obtain those goals (p.525). Burke-Litwin set out to distinguish between a set of variables “that influence and are influenced by climate and those influenced by culture” (p.527). The researchers further established two distinct sets of organizational dynamics one associated with transactional human behavior-everyday interactions and exchanges that impact climate. The second set of dynamics is concerned with processes of organizational transformation (fundamental changes in behavior) (p.527).

![Figure 1. Burke-Litwin Model of Organizational Performance and Change](image)

**Drivers of change.** The Burke-Litwin model (see Figure 1) presents the 12 drivers of change and ranks them in terms of importance. According to Burke-Litwin the external environmental box represents the output while the individual and performance box the output (p.527). The model is illustrated with the key factors featured at the top tier of the chart. The
lower tiers become gradually less important. The model contends that all of the factors are integrated (to greater or lesser degrees). Therefore, a change in one will eventually affect all other factors. The components are defined by Burke Litwin as the following:

- **External environment.** Any outside condition or situation that influences the organization which include markets, competition, other organizations, political situations and the economy.

- **Mission and strategy.** What the organization’s top management believes is the organization’s mission and strategy. What the employees within the organization believe is the central purpose of the organization. Organizations often utilize mission statements and employ a strategy which is how the organization plans to accomplish their mission over time.

- **Leadership.** Leadership refers to the executives providing the organization with an overall direction and serving as behavioral role models for all employees.

- **Culture.** Culture is defined as the “way we do things around here”. Culture is a collection of both overt and covert rules, values and principles that are enduring and guide organizational behavior.

- **Structure.** Structure refers to the arrangement of functions and people into specific areas and levels of responsibility, decision-making authority, communication, and relationships to assure effective implementation of the organization’s mission and strategies.

- **Management Practices.** What managers do in the normal course of events to utilize the human and material resources at their disposal to carry out the organization’s strategy.
• Systems. Standardized policies and mechanisms that facilitate work, primarily manifested in the organization’s reward systems, management information systems (MIS), and in such control systems as performance appraisal, goal and budget development, and human resource allocation.

• Climate. The collective current impressions, expectations, and feelings that members of local work units have that, in turn, affect their relations with their boss, with one another, and with other units.

• Task requirements/individual skills and abilities. The required behavior for task effectiveness, including specific skills and knowledge required of people to accomplish the work for which they were assigned and for which they feel they are directly responsible.

• Individual needs and values. Specific psychological factors that provide desire and worth for individual actions or thoughts.

• Motivation. Aroused behavior tendencies to move towards goals, take needed action, and persist until satisfaction is attained.

• Individual and organizational performance. The outcome or result as well as the indicator or effort and achievement (e.g. productivity, customer satisfaction, profit and quality).

**Transformational and transactional components.** The Burke-Litwin model is separated into components that are transformational or transactional. The transformational dynamic refers to the upper half of the model which includes the external environment, organizational culture, organizational performance, mission and strategy, and leadership (see
Figure 2). Burke-Litwin states, “For major organizational change to occur, the top transformational boxes represent the primary and noteworthy levers for that change” (p. 534). Transformational is defined by Burke-Litwin as “areas in which alteration is likely caused by interaction with environmental forces (both within and without) and require entirely new behavioral sets from organizational members” (p. 529).

![Diagram](image)

*Figure 2. Transformational Components*

Figure 3 (see below) contains the transactional variables—the lower half of the model. Burke-Litwin define this as the “primary way of alteration is via relatively short-term reciprocity among people and groups” (p. 530). The significant variation between transformational and transactional change within the model is that transformational change impact the organizational culture, while transactional change impacts the organizational climate.
The arrows within the Burke-Litwin model signify the open system aspect of the model. The arrows carry a level of significance that represent the amount of change between the components. The arrows in the transformational section of the model carry more weight, or have more influence on the change process. Change which occurs around these arrows have a higher probability of changing the entire system.

The weights in the transactional section of the model have a lesser effect on the amount change within the system. Changes associated with the lower arrows may not influence the entire system. In particular, the weights higher up in the model have a greater impact on the amount of change to the organization than the lower arrows. Burke-Litwin model indicates, “Moreover, in large scale total organizational change mission strategy, leadership and culture have more
“weight” than structure management practices, and systems: that is having organizational leaders communicate the strategy is not sufficient for effective change” (pp 526).

Burke-Litwin Model also incorporates different levels of organization: individual, group, and system. Individual levels are characterized within the task and individual skills, motivation, individual needs and values, and individual and organizational performance components. Group levels are represented within the work unit climate, systems, management practices, and structure components. System level components include the external environment, mission and strategy, leadership, and organizational culture. The levels also function as a means of simplifying the model into manageable groups (Burke & Litwin, 1992).

**Summary.** The Burke-Litwin model analyzes the change process within an organization. The model points to causal relationships that determine the level of performance which influence the process of change. Burke-Litwin recognize the number of variables that are changing at the same time, the magnitude of environmental changes and the resistance of human systems. The Burke-Litwin model was utilized as the lens within the research paper. The focus was on the influence of mandated educational change within a school. Looking at the transformational and transactional components of change within the model the goal was to seek an understanding of how these reform efforts influence educators.

**Chapter II: Literature Review**

A review of the current literature surrounding federal policies for educational reform, the current state of educational reform in the United States and influence of reform efforts on public
schools. The review of the literature is structured around six key categories which cover the following areas:

1. Federal Policies for educational reform: A Nation at Risk to Race to the Top.
2. Influence of reform efforts on public education.
3. Teacher evaluations in the wake of reform.
5. Common Core State Standards
6. Educators’ Perceptions of the Common Core State Standards

The literature review is organized to explain how reform efforts trickle down to affect states, school districts and schools. Through an examination of the research available on the topic of reform efforts the researcher sought to shed light on reform efforts in a historical context from the past few decades and how these efforts have evolved into current reform policies. The researcher also analyzed how the current reform efforts influenced teachers and students’ success. The literature review provided the current conversation pertaining to reform efforts and how these efforts applied have shaped the educational landscape.

**Federal Policies for Educational Reform: A Nation at Risk to Race to the Top**

Over the last twenty years the United States Congress combined with the Department of Education (USDOE) have concentrated their policy efforts on schools and, more specifically, teachers. Fullan (1994) indicates that as dissatisfaction with failed implementation grew in the 1970’s states and districts turned more to mandatory solutions. Spillane (2004) asserts since the 1980’s, the United States public policy-makers have attempted to influence change as an effort to
alleviate social ills, targeting education. The ambitions of these reforms are evident at the federal, state and local level. In 1983, the Reagan administration published "A Nation at Risk," as a dire warning of the need to reform U.S. schools. *A Nation at Risk* (1983) is recognized as a pivotal study in education which resulted in the current barrage of educational reform in the United States. The report was written by a commission created by then-Secretary of Education T.H. Bell. *A Nation at Risk* stressed that “International comparisons of student achievement, completed a decade ago, reveal that on 19 academic tests American students were never first or second and, in comparison with other industrialized nations, and were last seven times” (*Nation at Risk*, 1983). Employing imagery popular at the time because of the nuclear arms race, *Nation at Risk* said the United States had been “committing an act of unthinking unilateral educational disarmament” (para 2).

*A Nation at Risk* (1983) described secondary school curricular as “homogenized, diluted, and diffused to the point that they no longer have a central purpose” (para 3). In 1989 President George Bush convened his education summit at the University of Virginia. “Astonishingly, no teachers, professional educators, cognitive scientists, or learning experts were invited. The group that met to shape the future of American education consisted entirely of state governors. Education was too important; it seemed, to leave to educators” (Ansary, 2007). The outcome of President Bush’s educational summit set in motion national goals intended as a framework which allowed states to develop their own educational standards (*Tirozzi &Uro*, 1997). Another result of the meeting resulted in an agreement that education governance should remain state led however; the federal role of funding education was still vital (*Tirozzi &Uro*).
The 1990’s ushered in an era of rapid educational reform policies. President Clinton won two legislative victories for education, laying the foundation for a new accountability system that targeted standards (USDOE). The Goals 2000: Educate America Act aimed, “To improve learning and teaching by providing a national framework for education reform; to promote the research, consensus building, and systemic changes needed to ensure equitable educational opportunities and high levels of educational achievement for all students; to provide a framework for reauthorization of all federal education programs; to promote the development and adoption of a voluntary national system of skill standards and certifications; and for other purposes” (para 1). According to Jorgensen & Hoffman (2003), the movement toward standards-based education and assessment that began with A Nation at Risk “went national” with the passage of the Improving America's Schools Act of 1994. Jorgensen & Hoffman posit that the improving America’s Schools Act of 1994 reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, first enacted as part of President Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty, and designed to focus federal funding on poor schools with low achieving students. Title I, aimed at improving education for disadvantaged children in poor areas, was and remains the cornerstone of ESEA. There is a perception, according to Jorgensen & Hoffman, that Title I has helped raise the academic achievement of millions of disadvantaged children, particularly in basic skills.

This proverbial shift in the language during this new era of accountability emphasizes an evaluation of schools based primarily on results of standardized tests. In accordance to the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 a standards-based system of accountability was ushered in by all fifty states. Spillane (2012) suggests that much of the reform rhetoric embedded with the
standards and testing movement is the notion that all with greater accountability in schools, students will be able to achieve the American dream of mobility.

The adoption of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 put educational reform at center stage. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, signed into law by President Bush on January 8, 2002, was a reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, the central federal law in pre-collegiate education. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act was developed under President Lyndon B Johnson which connected the “war on poverty” with education. “On April 11, 1965, President Johnson adopted this approach and the ESEA was passed, with Title I representing the largest financial component of the legislation. The original legislative intent of Title I was “to provide financial assistance to local educational agencies serving areas with high concentrations of children from low-income families to expand and improve their educational programs by various means” (Kirst & Jung, 1991, p. 45). The Elementary and Secondary Education Act laid the foundation to No Child Left Behind Act of 2001.

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 expected states, school districts, and schools to ensure all students are proficient in grade-level math and reading by 2014 (New America, 2013). States define grade-level performance. The rate of increase required is chosen by each state. In order for a school to make adequate yearly progress, it must meet its targets for student reading and math proficiency each year. Schools must make “adequate yearly progress" toward this goal, whereby proficiency rates increase in the years leading up to 2014. A state’s total student proficiency rate and the rate achieved by student subgroups are all considered in the determination.
K-12 education in the United States until recently, was left up to the individual states with the federal government contributing approximately 10% of the total expended according to Sable & Hill, (2006). The remaining costs were picked up through state and local taxes and as a result states had a level of autonomy (Sable & Hill, 2006). The federal education landscape changed dramatically with the passage of the No Child Left Behind in (2001) which as discussed previously was a reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Act of 1965 (Pallas, 2010). Standards based reform before NCLB (2001) occurred at the state level rather than the national level offering states guidance as opposed to a set of directives (Desimone, 2013). Barrett (2009) conceptualizes this educational reform as discourse – stressing standards, accountability and marketization - shaped and established largely by the state and its agents in the official recontextualizing field while the status and agency of those (teachers, in particular) in the pedagogic recontextualizing field have been significantly constrained.

Stephens (2010) posits that the top-down approach to education reform is harming schools. Stephens explains that “federal mandates are eroding elementary and secondary education, even though schooling is constitutionally a state responsibility. Washington calls the tune while providing only 9 percent of the funding” (para 1). Perceptions towards school reform models in the wake of NCLB left educators struggling to come to terms with the complexities (Esposito, Davis and Swain, 2012). Kastle (2012) argues that with over 20 years of reform educators have developed a professional inferiority complex combined with a strong sense of hopelessness. Payne (2010) maintained that ‘‘the disconnect between policymakers and reformers, on the one hand, and the realities of urban schools, on the other, is especially plain
when we look at the assumptions in play when reformers try to put their ideas into actual practice” (p. 153). Esposito, Davis and Swain (2012) ascertain that school reform limits educators’ abilities to create lessons that inspire creativity and civic responsibility.

**Influence of Reform Efforts on Public Education**

Spillane (2012) points out that “despite two decades of dramatic shifts in educational reform and policy among states and local school districts pre– and post–No Child Left Behind (NCLB), we see that the more things have changed, the more things seem to have stayed the same” (pp 123). The No Child Left Behind Act (2001) promised goals that were perceived as impossible to achieve. Wallis (2008) states, “For one thing, in the view of many educators, the law's 2014 goal — which calls for all public school students in grades 4 through 8 to be achieving on grade level in reading and math — is something no educational system anywhere on earth has ever accomplished” (para 1). Smith and Kovacs (2011) determined that there is an understanding amongst educators that the mathematic and reading skills targeted under No Child Left Behind are vital.

There is a belief that No Child Left Behind required a curriculum that was too limited and narrow and does not allow educators to be creative with their lesson plans (Darling-Hammond, 2010; McCarthey, 2008; Smith and Kovacs, 2011). Spillane (2006), analyzing the effect of reform on student achievement looked at what happened in nine Michigan school districts in the early 1990s after the state introduced new mathematics standards. The standards were intended to lead to substantial changes in classroom practice and, ultimately, higher student performance. Spillane noted that the new standards caused educators interpretation of the standards fluctuated
drastically. Spillane (2006) determined that educators perceived them as calling for substantial changes in practice and made corresponding adjustments in their instruction; others viewed them in a relatively superficial way, making few changes. Most important Spillane determined that the new standards did not improve student achievement.

The Gates Foundation examined the effectiveness of prevalent teacher evaluation methods to determine how evaluations inform educators and improve student achievement (Sawchuk, 2010). The Gates Foundation discovered methods that offered a more definitive indication of teacher effectiveness and performance were the techniques that employed multiple measures to evaluate. These multiple measures, according to the study determined observations and student test scores as effective means to evaluate teachers (Sawchuk, 2010). The study also revealed that teacher effectiveness was closely related to student perceptions of their teachers and whether they thought their teachers provided lessons that promoted academic success. The study concluded there was a relationship between student perceptions and academic growth (Darling-Hammond, Amrein-Beardsley, Haertel, & Rothstein, 2012). Spurred by these assessments, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation embraced the cause, spending $290 million on pilot projects “to transform how teachers are recruited, developed, rewarded, and retained.”

The Gates Foundation added another $45 million in research for its Measures of Effective Teaching (MET) project, aiming to better understand and identify what makes a teacher efficient. The Obama administration dangled the sweetest carrot of all, Race to the Top: a $4.35 billion grant program to spur a nationwide education overhaul, offering states significant funding if they were willing to rebuild their current evaluation systems (Marzano and Toth, 2013).
Race to the Top was drafted as part of President Obama’s 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, a $787 billion economic stimulus package whereas $130 billion were earmarked for educational programs (NEA, 2009). The Race to the Top Fund is the largest federal investment in school reform, utilizing $4.35 billion of the economic stimulus funds set aside for education (US Department of Education, 2009). “Race to the Top rewards states for past accomplishments, create incentives for future improvements, and challenge states to create comprehensive strategies for addressing the four central areas of reform that will drive school improvement” (US Department of Education, 2009). The four categories of reform according to the US Department of Education (2009) that states would address include:

- Adopting internationally benchmarked standards and assessments that prepare students for success in college and the workplace;
- Recruiting, developing, retaining, and rewarding effective teachers and principals, especially where they are needed most;
- Building data systems that measure student success and inform teachers and principals about how they can improve instruction; and
- Turning around our lowest-achieving schools.

Race to the Top grant ushered in a new era of reform focusing on creating national standards and reevaluating how school districts evaluate teachers and administrators. The two challenges that have occurred as a result of Race to the Top are the new standards and the evaluation process.
Danielson (2001) states, “The push for teacher quality has developed from the modern school reform movement” (p.2) that began with the publication of A Nation at Risk in 1983. Combined with the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 states were suddenly required to train, recruit and evaluate highly qualified teachers (Anderson, 2012; Hazi & Rucinski, 2009). Weiss and Payzant (2013) note that for states to win Race to the Top grants, they must promise to raise academic standards and develop new ways to evaluate students’ progress toward these standards. Weiss and Payzant point out that states are required to develop better student data, and use this data to evaluate teachers and principals (and, sometimes, entire schools). Ravitch (2013) argues, “Teachers will be evaluated in relation to their students' test scores. Schools that continue to get low test scores will be closed or turned into charter schools or handed over to private management. In low-performing schools, principals will be fired, and all or half of the staff will be fired. States are encouraged to create many more privately managed charter schools” (para 3).

Darling-Hammond (2013) examined research on successful approaches to teacher evaluation and determined the following criteria based on the findings. Darling-Hammond indicated that teacher evaluation should be based on professional teaching standards and that evaluations should include multi-faceted evidence of teacher practice, student learning, and professional contributions. In addition, Darling-Hammond suggests that evaluators should be knowledgeable about instruction and well-trained in the evaluation system and that evaluations should be accompanied by useful feedback that is connected to professional development opportunities that are relevant to teachers’ goals and needs.
Teacher Evaluations in the Wake of Reform

Froese-Germain (2011) suggests that reform efforts have created a highly charged climate of data driven accountability combined with teacher effectiveness. As a result, the conversation of teacher evaluations and compensations has shifted to merit pay. Tan (2013) posits that merit pay does not offer enough of an increase to successfully motivate teachers to perform better. In addition, Tam notes that educators and education analysts reveal teachers are rarely motivated by money. Michigan Council for Educator Effectiveness (2013) reported that educator evaluations must not be used to determine merit pay. The group founded in 2011 released a report on the state’s evaluation system and noted that there is insufficient evidence to support pay-for-performance programs at this time. The Michigan Council for Educator Effectiveness report also suggests that performance-related pay and the monitoring systems that come with it can backfire, decreasing motivation and quality performance. Tan wrote, "Merit pay seems like a simple answer that should work, but it often doesn't," said Richard Speaker, chair of the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at the University of New Orleans. "The vast majority of teachers are not motivated by a little higher pay”.

Critics argue the new evaluation measures are unbalanced, often relying heavily on state tests to determine teacher effectiveness. Ravitch (2010) posits that those lofty goals were never, and will never materialize and states that the basic strategy is measuring and punishing. Ravitch further discusses, "And it turns out as a result of putting so much emphasis on the test scores, there's a lot of cheating going on, there's a lot of gaming the system. Instead of raising standards it's actually lowered standards because many states have 'dumbed down' their tests or changed
the scoring of their tests to say that more kids are passing than actually are” (para 5). Baeder (2011) suggests, “there is an increasingly popular narrative in the armchair-ed-reform community today which suggests that the primary barrier to improved student results is teachers' ignorance of effective teaching strategies, or their failure to implement them” (para 1). There is a great divide in determining how new teacher evaluations impact student success and educator morale. When states began revamping their educator evaluation in the wake of Race to the Top, some states like Florida turned to the Marzano Causal evaluation process for teacher effectiveness.

Marzano’s Causal Teacher Evaluation Model is a framework that focuses on the measure of teacher effectiveness as well as the identification of professional development needed for improvement (Marzano, 2012). The Marzano Causal evaluative framework measures teacher effectiveness by assessing current teacher performance levels according to specific criteria such as providing clear student learning objectives, evaluating and tracking progress, establishing an environment conducive to learning, and rewarding student achievement and success. It is perceived that the model embeds Marzano’s research on teaching strategies providing teachers guidance on how to improve their classroom instruction in order to raise student achievement, therefore, identifying the “causal” links between teacher practice and student learning gains (PRWEB, 2011). Marzano indicates that the content strategies are also measured through teacher ability to assess student knowledge levels and adapt curriculum to meet those levels. At the end of the school year, a summative evaluation identifies a current level of effectiveness and areas in need of professional development to which professional goals are set.
Baeder contends the silliness of this logic, becomes apparent when we start adding up effect sizes. Baeder further posits that Marzano indicated that teachers can markedly improve student learning with just one or two strategies, as Marzano’s "causal" language implies, therefore educators should be able to see a dramatic rise in test scores through implementation of several strategies however, the logic does not seem to add up. Baeder suggests that if we have this much power to improve student learning just by obeying Dr. Marzano, where are the so called 90/90/90 schools? Effect sizes are a legitimate thing, but Marzano is misconstruing their meaning to imply that whenever fewer than 100% of students are below standard, the solution is to force teachers to implement strategy after strategy.

Compounding the issue, many states that have implemented the Marzano Causal evaluation system have alternatively adopted the new value-added-model which evaluates students test scores. In some cases districts are using these scores as a percentage towards the overall evaluation. Darling-Hammond, etc., al (2012) indicate that “Value-added models” (VAMs), designed to evaluate student test score gains from one year to the next, are often promoted as tools to accomplish this goal. Using VAMs for individual teacher evaluation is based on the belief that measured achievement gains for a specific teacher’s students reflect that teacher’s “effectiveness.” This attribution, however, assumes that student learning is measured well by a given test, is influenced by the teacher alone, and is independent from the growth of classmates and other aspects of the classroom context. None of these assumptions is well supported by current evidence” (Darling-Hammond, Amrein-Beardsley, Haertel, & Rothstein, 2012). In addition, Baeder (2011) points out that value-added models have shown that teachers
are responsible for 20-40% of the variance in student performance, meaning 60-80% of student learning is dependent on factors other than the teacher. Baeder posits, “So let's start by acknowledging that teaching simply does not have the power to solve all of society's problems. Poverty matters. Parents matter. School culture matters. Student health matters. Teachers matter too, but they are far from the only salient factor in student learning” (para 7).

There is a belief according to Darling-Hammond, etc., al (2012) that policy makers agree most current teacher evaluation systems do little to help teachers improve or to support personnel decision making. In addition, Darling-Hammond, etc., al point to a growing consensus that evidence of teacher contributions to student learning should be part of teacher evaluation systems, along with evidence about the quality of teacher practices.

**Educators’ Perceptions of the New Teacher Evaluation System**

Schmoker (2012) suggests the new teacher evaluation system suffers from “too much, too soon” syndrome and leaves essential gaps within its logic. Anderson (2012) posits, “My complaint is with the frameworks themselves--their sheer bulk and their sloppy, agenda-driven language. They're absurdly long; teachers are desperately trying to design lessons to meet criteria described in as many as 116 categories” (para 4). Administrators are expected to use these unwieldy instruments to conduct up to six full-period observations per teacher per year and to conduct both pre-observation and post-observation conferences for each observation with every teacher” (Schmoker).

Research suggests that the perceptions of educators over a new Race to the Top evaluation have changed over the last couple of years. Initially there appeared to be a backlash
against the new evaluation systems that states were adopting. National surveys point to an overall positive increase in educators’ perceptions of a new evaluation system as a result of Race to the Top. Rosenberg & Silva (2012) discussed a recent poll by education Sector of over 1,000 K-12 teachers and learned that the majority feel the new teacher evaluation process is improving. Rosenberg & Silva report that according to the survey, 76% stated the criteria for evaluations were fair. In addition, 54% agree that assessing student knowledge is a reasonable measure of teacher effectiveness, a percentage that increased from 49% in 2007. The results echo the state of Tennessee’s survey of more than 26,000 educators within the state (Tennessee Consortium, 2013). The survey, conducted in 2013, showed a 10-15 percentage point increase about the qualitative aspects of teacher evaluations (Tennessee Consortium). The report also determined that teachers believe those evaluating were more qualified, the evaluation process was fair and less likely to indicate that the evaluations caused stress and classroom disruptions (Tennessee Consortium). The study further explains the rationale behind the increases in teacher confidence which points to revamped evaluator training and most importantly a system that stresses teacher improvement rather than judgment (Tennessee Consortium).

Brown (2014) indicates that the push for states to adopt and implement new evaluations is not without complications. Brown demonstrates this by stating in Washington D.C. the teachers’ union filed a class-action grievance against the D.C. Public Schools over erroneous performance evaluations that caused one teacher to be fired. The issue centers on the calculations that determine a teachers’ rating. In New York one middle school teacher with high walk-through evaluations is now on an improvement plan due to low student test scores. As a
result, teachers working with new evaluations have expressed concerns about parents losing confidence and the scrutiny they will be under if they have an unsatisfactory evaluation (Strauss, 2012). Newman (2012) indicates that teachers also expressed concerns that teacher evaluations may lead to fights over higher performing students and neglect students in need. According to Newman, one educator indicated that, “Teachers have little to no control over scheduling, curriculum, and discipline policy but these factors have an enormous effect on outcome.”

**Common Core State Standards**

In the spring of 2009 governors and state commissioners from across the United States formed the Common Core Standards Initiative (Kendall, 2011). The purpose of this new initiative according to Kendall (2011) was to create a set of shared national standards ensuring that students in every state are held accountable to the same expectations that students in the world’s highest-performing countries are, and that they have access to knowledge and skills that will prepare them for success in postsecondary education and in the global arena. ASCD (2012) posit that “Technological progress and the rapid development of many third world countries have flattened the world, advancing global interconnectedness and global competitiveness—and challenging the United States’ continued economic vitality. K–12 education plays a vital role in developing the nation’s future workforce, and a common set of high, internationally benchmarked college- and career-readiness standards makes more sense than ever before” (pp 7).

In 2010 the release by the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and the Council of Chief State School Officers set of state-led education standards, known as the Common Core State Standards (US Department of Education, 2010). The US Secretary of
Education Arne Duncan stated, “The release today of the Common Core State Standards is an important step toward the improvement of quality education nationwide. States have come together to develop standards that are internationally benchmarked and include the knowledge and skills that students must learn to succeed in college and career” (US Department of Education, 2010).

The Common Core State Standards placed an emphasis in the approach to literacy instruction. Coleman and Pimentel authors of the Common Core (2012) suggest that, at the heart of the standards are instructions for shifting the focus of literacy instruction to center on careful examination of the text itself. In addition, Coleman and Pimentel point out that the new standards, aligned materials, work in reading and writing (as well as speaking and listening) and must center on the text under consideration. The standards focus on students reading closely to draw evidence and knowledge from the text and require students to read texts of adequate range and complexity. Coleman and Pimentel acknowledge that there is a shift in the emphasis around the texts that students read and the kinds of questions students should address as they write and speak about them.

In 2013, after facing much criticism over the federal government’s alleged control over the Common Core State Standards, Arne Duncan addressed the American Society of New Editors in regards to the Common Core (US Department of Education, 2013). As he said, “I believe the Common Core State Standards may prove to be the single greatest thing to happen to public education in America since Brown versus Board of Education—and the federal government had nothing to do with creating them” (US Department of Education, 2013).
The push to the new Common Core State Standards have been met with much resistance. Strauss (2013) points to comments made by American Federation of Teachers Randi Weingarten said at a National Education Writers Association in Washington D.C. According to Strauss (2013) Weingarten suggested that education officials in New York have not adequately prepared teachers to execute the new standards and, in a rush to implement the Core and give students Core-aligned standardized tests, provided packets of lesson plans, while some districts bought material from corporations rushing to get it on the market. The implementation of the Common Core State Standards in New York State did not result in student achievement. Strauss states, “In New York, there has been tremendous controversy over the first administration of a Core aligned standardized test. In August, results were released and it turned out that just as education officials had predicted before the tests were given, the scores fell by 30 percent” (para 9).

Darling-Hammond (2013) suggests that developing a shared vision of educational goals and supportive instruction is essential to building a system that can support effective teaching. The Common Core State Standards are potentially useful however; there is fear that states will not successfully implement the standards and never provide the professional development for successful implementation. (Ravitch, 2013). Carol Burris, a principal and initial supporter of the Common Core determined that testing, coupled with the evaluation of teachers by scores, is driving its implementation (Strauss, 2013). Burris explained that the promise of the Common Core is dying and teaching and learning are being distorted, the well that should sustain the Core has been poisoned (Strauss, 2013). “As policy moves from the capitol to the classroom, school districts work to figure out what the policy means for their work” (Spillane, 2004, p.7).
Hendershott (2013) indicates that in New York City, K-12 public school principals sent a letter to New York Education Commissioner John King documenting their fears that they feel too many educators will use these high stakes tests to guide their curricula, rather than the more meaningful Common Core Standards themselves. Parents and educators also noted the growing frustration amongst students as a result of the new Common Core State Standards. Diane Ravitch (2013) after much hesitation concluded that the Common Core standards have been adopted in 46 states and the District of Columbia without any field test and ultimately could not endorse them. Ravitch (2013) further clarifies that these new standards are being imposed on the children of this nation despite the fact that no one has any idea how they will affect students, teachers, or schools. “We are a nation of guinea pigs, almost all trying an unknown new program at the same time” (Ravitch, 2013).

**Educators’ Perceptions of the Common Core State Standards**

Hess and Petrilli (2007) indicate that NCLB required states to present their own (a) curricular standards math, language arts, and science and (b) measures which determine if students are meeting those standards. The shift from NCLB to the Common Core State Standards occurred as a result of education equity. Arne Duncan (2009) highlighted the inconsistencies in a speech stating “What we have had as a country, I’m convinced, is what we call a race to the bottom. We have 50 different standards, 50 different goal posts. And due to political pressure, those have been dumbed down” (para.2). Porter, Polikoff & Smithson (2009) found “considerable variability [of content standards] from one state to the next” (p. 264). As a
result of these inconsistencies the federal government moved towards creating a national set of standards that each state could follow to reach a level of education equity.

The development of the Common Core Standards was swift, taking approximately one year to create whereas former reform efforts aimed at standards took approximately seven years (Main, 2012). As a result, there is a sense of urgency from educators regarding the push towards full implementation. Murphy and Regenstein (2012) posit that there will be three ways that the Common Core State Standards will be implemented: (1) States will approach implementation as business-as-usual by continuing to use hard-copy textbooks, paper assessments, and face-to-face professional development; (2) In a bare bones lowest-cost alternative, schools will primarily utilize online and open-source materials and resources; (3) States will use a mix of traditional and bare bones in a balanced approach to implementation.

According to a Hart Research survey (2013) in a survey of approximately 800 K-12 teachers, 75% approve with their state’s decision to adopt the new Common Core State Standards. The perception of the Common Core State Standards from educators is that they will not inhibit student achievement and will improve upon the quality of education (AFT, 2013). Initially educators appreciated the reciprocal nature of the standards, allowing students more consistency if they move to another state (Cogan, Schmidt & Huong, 2011). While it appears educators approve of the new standards the problem lies with the implementation and timing of the new mandates.
Educators express concerns that state testing will begin before teachers can properly align the curriculum (Hart Research). Teachers convey that their present curricular materials and textbooks are not properly aligned to the new standards (EPE, 2012). Currently districts are focusing on unwrapping the new standards and mapping out the curriculum before full implementation begins with no understanding of what the state assessments will look like (Demski, 2013). Warner Center for Professional Development and Reform (2012) surveyed 366 educators in states that have adopted the Common Core State Standards. The survey focusing on the new math standards indicated 84.4% believe the new standards emphasizes complex problems (Warner Center Report, 2012). In addition, 74% believe that their school districts provide opportunities to learn about the new math standards (Warner Report, 2013). The Hart Research (2013) pointed out that only half of the almost 800 teachers polled felt that they are receiving adequate professional development from their district (Hart Research) “Although most teachers have received some professional development related to the CCSS, respondents have typically spent less than four days in such training” (EPE, 2012).

Through this literature review, it revealed the continuous cycle of educational reform and the impact it has on stakeholders. A Nation at Risk sent out a dire warning that our educational system was broken and was a direct threat to our nation. The 1990’s saw a continued trend towards standards and accountability leading to No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. Race to the Top requires states to adopt new criteria towards teacher evaluations and standards. The Marzano Causal evaluation system framework measures teacher effectiveness by assessing current teacher performance levels according to specific criteria however, critics argue that these
measures are not an effective tool for evaluation. In addition the new Common Core Standards are being implemented hastily, without fidelity and will ultimately fail.

**Chapter III: Methodology**

The Burke-Litwin (1992) model of change shows cause-and-effect relationships between an organization’s internal and external environments, aimed at explaining their link to organizational effectiveness. According to Burke and Litwin, change models are not meant to be prescriptive, rather they are meant to provide a means to diagnose, plan and manage change. The Burke-Litwin model provided the lens to examine the effect of mandated policy change within Southview Middle School. The model offered a framework to assess how teachers and administrators are working through the change process. In addition the Burke-Litwin model presented further examination of human behavior as a result of the change process and address the current situation vs. the desired outcome. The methodology for the research design is a qualitative case study. Utilizing focus groups and interviews the researcher aspired to identify and establish common themes that emerged from the stakeholders experiencing mandated change.

The research design employed a case study on a middle school (Southview Middle) located in Central Florida. Stake (1995) described case study methodology as an approach of inquiry in which the researcher explores in-depth a program, event, activity, process on one or more individuals. The research design is grounded in a social constructivist paradigm. Creswell (2007) posits, “In this worldview, individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live
and work. They develop subjective meanings of their experience—meanings directed towards certain objects or things. These meanings are varied and multiple, leading the researcher to look for complexity of views rather than narrow the meaning into a few categories or ideas” (p. 20).

**Research Questions**

Two researcher questions guide the design of this study and subsequent analysis. They are:

1. How do educators at a medium-sized middle school in Central Florida perceive the positive and detrimental impact of federal and state mandated reforms?

2. In particular, how does the leadership and staff of Southview Middle School perceive the positive and deleterious impact of the most recent federal and state mandates to adopt the Common Core State Standards and engage in the Marzano teacher evaluation process?

**Research Design**

The research study warranted a qualitative approach to investigate the effect of mandated policy reform within a school. Much of the research focused on the policy rather than the bearing the mandated policy had on the stakeholders involved. Compounding the problem policy reform is enduring without a solid understanding of how educators are navigating through the changes. Creswell (2009) classifies qualitative research as “a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (p.4). The research design took place in a natural school setting which is described by Crewell as a
place where researchers have face-to-face interaction with participants over time. The goal for the researcher was to seek and examine the “what” and “how” questions that surfaced. Hatch (2002) points out that often the “what” question may involve a phenomenon, a person, or a program; whereas, the “how” question looks at how participants are influenced within a circumscribed system. Creswell discusses the importance of participants’ meanings and the goal of the researcher is a continued focus on learning the meaning that the participants hold about a problem or issue.

**Research Tradition**

An explanatory single-case study design (Yin, 2003) was used to explore the effect of mandated policy change within a school. Yin posits that a case study is a unique class of qualitative work that explores an ongoing phenomenon within a quantified margin. This methodology was chosen because “a case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (Yin, 2003, p.13). Merriam (1988) offered illustrations of a limited phenomenon within education as “...a program, an event, a person, a process, an institution, or a social group” (p. 13). Creswell posits that case studies are a strategy of inquiry in which the researcher derives a general, abstract theory of a process, action or interaction which is grounded in the views of the participants. Creswell determined that case study attributes incorporate investigating a precise theme circumscribed in a particular time and space, distributing a comprehensive account of qualified information about the case setting,
collecting data from a wide-variety of sources to offer a comprehensive understanding of the case, and employing the investigator as a vehicle of data collection.

Powell (1996) describes a focus group as a group of individuals selected by the researcher to share their individual experiences on a particular area that is the subject of the researcher. Kreuger and Casey (2000) ascertain that participants are selected based on their relationship to the researcher’s topic in addition to characteristics that they have in common. Kotler (1987) maintains the importance of having a homogenous group that are brought together by the researcher to discuss a specific set of issues under the guidance of a leader that will stimulate and focus a discussion. Patton (1990) suggests that focus group interviews consist of gathering several perspectives from participants, within an organized group, in a limited amount of time.

The role of the researcher during a focus group is to act as a facilitator and a moderator. Patton discussed the role the researcher plays within a focus group to obtain several perspectives during a limited amount of time. Villard (n.d) points to the importance of the moderator within the focus group, “A moderator must be identified who is familiar and comfortable with the group process and one who can keep the participants on target. The moderator must be a good listener and observer and a skilled facilitator. The moderator should be trained to not let personal feelings arise between participants or the process could be sabotaged.”

Participants

The site location of the research design is a single site; Southview Middle School is located in a suburban community within Central Florida. Southview Middle is a high performing
school in a high performing school district. Over 80% of the students are reading at the state expectant reading level. 96% of students at Southview enrolled in algebra classes passed the End of Course (EOC) exams while 100% of students enrolled in geometry and biology honors passed the rigorous End of Course exams.

Southview only hires teachers that are certified through the Florida Department of Education and more than 44% of teachers hold advanced degrees. The faculty consists of 80 teachers, three guidance counselors serving each grade level, one dean, three assistant principals and one principal. The school serves approximately 1,300 students in grades 6-8. Southview Middle School was chosen as the research site because it is a school located within Florida that has experienced significant organizational change as a result of the state moving towards Common Core implementation and the new Marzano causal teacher evaluations.

Creswell discusses maintaining a “holistic account” which involves the researcher pulling from multiple perspectives (pp. 39). The purpose of these multiple perspectives allows researchers to identify all of the dynamics inside these varying perceptions. As a result, Creswell points out that the researcher does not become bound to strict or narrow cause- and -effect patterns instead they are able to see the complexity of the problem (pp. 39). Utilizing multiple participants within the research that teach different subject areas and have varying backgrounds allowed the research to have that holistic approach a qualitative research study warrants. The strength of this case study involved the ability for the participants to speak openly and honestly regarding the effects of the change process on their lives.
The sampling method for this research design included a purposeful sampling process to that selected the participants for the research study. Creswell discusses the idea behind a qualitative study that purposefully selects participants is to better help both the researcher and the research question. Patton indicates that purposefully means the collection of evidence-rich cases are exposed to an extensive study. Creswell determines unlike a quantitative design, qualitative research does not suggest a random sample of participants.

The sample size for the research included educators from varying backgrounds (subject areas, length of time as an educator and degrees held) and the administration at Southview Middle. The administration each play a different role at the school especially in terms of implementing professional development tied to Common Core State Standards and the subject areas evaluated under the new system so was vital to include their perspectives. Patton suggests that qualitative inquiry typically focuses in depth on relatively small samples, even single cases (n = 1), selected purposefully.

The research design utilized four focus groups in addition to one interview which allowed a balance of information without reaching a saturation point. According to Millward (1995) there is a redundancy within the data that is generated after 10 focus group session. It is suggested that one focus group on any topic is enough to generate valid results (Duke University, n.d). Krueger (1994) suggests that the minimum may be three and the maximum 12. Nyamathi and Shuler (1990) state that four focus groups are sufficient for researchers to successfully implement a study however, that attention of participants’ responses reaching saturation should be made after the third.
Finally, Stewart and Shamdasani (1990) suggest that there are no universal guidelines as to the ideal number of focus groups and one can reach the necessary level of saturation needed in a qualitative study.

The sample size for the research design consisted of a minimum of four participants per focus group and a maximum of ten. The researcher recruited additional participants in the event that one does not attend the focus group. Research specified that the sample size of a focus group appears to be one of the most debatable issues. Morgan (1996) suggests from a moderator standpoint, smaller groups are easier to manage, especially if the topics are highly charged and there is much discussion. Carey (1994) supports this idea and suggests with a smaller focus group there is more of a probability of interaction between the participants. However, she also states that smaller focus groups can be more labor-intensive. Creswell (2007) posits that “one general guideline in qualitative research is not only to study a few sites or individuals but also to collect extensive detail about each site or individual studied. The intent of qualitative research is not to generalize the information but to elucidate the particular, the specific” (p.126).

According to Patton, focus group interviews involve the same level of quality-control as a one-on-one interview. There is a level of preparation required by the researcher to ensure the focus group is meaningful and utilizes the time appropriately. McNamara (1999) indicates that the focus group interviews compel the researcher to thoughtfully strategize for a well-thoughtout approach within these five areas: (a) preparing for the session, (b) developing the questions, (c) planning the session, (d) facilitating the session, and (e) ending the session.
The researcher collected data from two sources which include administrators (principal and assistant principal) and teachers. The focus groups were reserved for the teachers and assistant principals whereas the one-on-one interview was conducted with the principal. Patton (1990) suggests that interviews permit a collection of data that the researcher would not be able to initially observe. The Southview administration possess a different perspective on the implementation of Marzano causal evaluations and Common Core. The district sets guidelines and principals designate the role of the administrators within the school. To understand what is happening at a district level it requires a one-on-one interview with the principal as opposed to a focus group. Yin determines that interviews are a vital component to a case study because, “case studies are about human affairs.... These human affairs should be reported and interpreted through the eyes of specific interviewees, and well–informed respondents can provide important insights into a situation” (p. 85). The belief is that if administration was part of the focus group participants may not be as willing to discuss the impact of policy reform on their daily practice.

**Recruitment and Access**

Research and interviews took place at Southview Middle School. Interviews and focus groups were conducted with administrative personnel and teachers on site. Participation in the research design is strictly on a voluntary basis and participants can leave at any time. Recruitment of participants began with notification and approval of the research design from the school district and principal. An email was sent to the superintendent outlining the research study, design and purpose. As a result, the researcher needed to obtain permission from the
school district through their own review process which was secured before research began. The principal was notified and permission was requested to conduct the study at the school site.

Research participants were given a consent form which adheres to Creswell’s (2007) model for acquiring consent approval. The consent approval form included the following: (a) involvement with the research study is on a voluntary basis, (b) participants have a right to withdraw from the study at any time, (c) the basis of the study and the data collection procedures to be used, (d) an assurance of confidentiality statement, (e) a statement listing any risks to the participants, (f) any expected benefits to the participants, and (g) a signature and date line giving permission to participate in the study.

Each participant completed a consent form which included:

- Their right to voluntarily withdraw from the study at any time
- The purpose of the study
- The methods that will be used for data collection
- Data storage during and after the interviews
- Comments on the protection of participants
- A statement regarding the known risks of participation
- A statement of the expected benefits of the study
- A place for the participants to sign and date the form (Creswell, 1998, p.115-116)
Data Collection

Creswell posits that qualitative research employs different philosophical assumptions, strategies of inquiry and methods for data collection. The researcher prepared for the focus group and interview sessions by first identifying the objectives of the interview/focus group and determining the logistics. The next step involved the researcher notifying the participants of the time, date and location for the sessions. The location of the focus groups was predetermined by the researcher. Creswell states that it is important for the researcher to find a physical setting that is free from distractions, especially if the participants are being recorded. Seidman (2006) suggests that researchers keep the original data to refer back to and check for accuracy. The researcher developed questions based on extensive research of the topic and literature and created questions that were clear and succinct in gathering the needed facts for the research design.

McNamara (1999) discusses the importance of: (a) scheduling a one to two hour time period to conduct the interviews at a convenient time for all participants, (b) selecting a comfortable location with preferably a large circular table, (c) providing name tags and refreshments for the participants upon arrival, (d) establishing the ground rules in advance, (e) developing and sharing a comprehensive agenda, and (f) securing all equipment needed to audiotape the interview. Patton's (2002) recommends that the researcher focus on facilitating the group by asking neutral questions, using illustrative examples, prefatory statements and announcements, probes and follow-up questions, process feedback during the focus group interview. To maintain confidentiality focus group participants were given a code which
consisted of a number and a letter (ex: A, 1) prior to the start of the focus group. The number and letter sequence matched the number of participants. Participants were referred to these codes during the focus group to ensure discretion and to maintain anonymity.

**Data Storage**

The research design is structured to maintain the confidentiality of the participants involved in addition to the school that is allowing this research design. IRB approval was solidified before the research study was implemented. In addition the researcher contacted the school district for Southview Middle to obtain permission before conducting the research study. Creswell (2009) points to the need for researchers to foster trust and promote integrity. As discussed participants’ identity remained anonymous throughout the study and will be referred to as participant A, B…etc. The data collected within this the research study consisted of audio recordings and transcribed tapes. Creswell considers the often overlooked aspect of data storage. As suggested by Creswell interviews, focus questions, participant list with codes was backed up on a secured computer file. Participants’ names were coded to ensure anonymity and audio tapes were kept in a locked storage file and destroyed following transcription. The researcher transcribed the audio tapes and was responsible for destroying the tapes.

**Data Analysis**

The researcher collected data from two sources, focus group interviews with instructional staff and assistant principals in addition to a one-on-one interview with the principal. As suggested by Seidman (2006) each interview ranged from 45-60 minutes. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, coded and analyzed. Creswell (2009) recommends that
the researcher plan how the data will be stored in a controlled and organized structure, and in a location that is safe and guarantees protection. The participants knew in advance that the interviews will be recorded.

Creswell points to the importance of preparing the data for analysis, conducting different analysis, moving deeper and deeper into understanding the data, representing the data and most importantly discovering the meaning behind the data collected. Upon completion of the focus groups and interviews the notes were transcribed using RevWorks software and run through the MAXqda software program. Creswell discusses the benefits of this software program designed for personal computers (PC). The MAXqda program according to Creswell, allows the researcher to systematically analyze, evaluate and interpret qualitative data. As a result the program allowed the research to be coded and categorized so any of the themes that emerged were categorized and analyzed. Creswell discusses taking the significance of the statements from the participants involved and grouping them into “meaning units” or themes. The research questions were aimed to locate and analyze any of these “meaning units” that Creswell discusses.

Creswell points out that the data analysis required in a qualitative case study requires a detailed description of both the case and setting. The qualitative research design employed a constant comparative method of data collection to initially classify universal themes followed by a comprehensive examination of the most significant themes that emerged within the research. Maykut and Morehouse (1994) suggest that the constant-comparative method is a comprehensive organizational data inquiry process where the researcher follows a proposed format. Maykut and Morehouse validates this format which includes: (a) reading and coding
each data piece carefully, (b) organizing each data piece into categories, (c) comparing each new data piece to existing categories to determine whether the new data fit an existing category or falls into a new category, (d) looking for emerging themes within each category, and (e) repeating the process for finding the most salient themes. Patton (1990) discusses this category of inquiry as inductive and further suggests that inductive analysis allows classifications to develop from patterns within a case study.

According to Rossman and Rallis (1998), coding is the process of organizing the material into segments of text before you bring meaning. Glaser and Strauss (1967) suggest that when fostering groups inductively from raw data, researchers are benefitted through the constant comparative method since it is not only able to motivate the researchers’ unique perspective, but is also able to make dissimilarities between categories evident. Creswell describes the process of coding which involves gathering text or data during the data collection process and segmenting sentences (or paragraphs), images into categories with a term based on the actual language of the participant which is called *In Vivo*.

**Trustworthiness**

A factor of trustworthiness lies in the researcher’s ability to provide validating evidence and this is done through the triangulation of data. Creswell (2009) discusses the researcher making use of multiple and different sources [and] methods that will shed light on research perspectives. Triangulation of methods in qualitative research was used to increase the validity of the study. The researcher collected information from a varied range of individuals and settings
using an array of methods, triangulation reduced the risk that conclusions would reflect only the methodical biases or limitations of a specific method and allowed the researcher to gain an improved understanding of the validity and generality of the explanations being developed. The research design utilized a range of data collected through participants within the focus groups and interviews to triangulate. Triangulation, according to Yin (2005) is not as simple as it seems. Yin (2005) discusses the corroborating evidence, at times, given by administration that reflects more of a mantra developed over time when speaking to outsiders.

Conclusion

The purpose of this case study is to explore the influence of mandated educational reform in a public school setting. Southview Middle is a public school located in the state of Florida which has experienced significant mandated change over the last decade as a result of these educational initiatives. Using the lens of the Burke-Litwin Model of Organizational change the researcher examined the perceptions of these change efforts and how they influenced a school. Analysis of these change efforts through multiple stakeholders within the school provided a holistic viewpoint and permitted the researcher to study the problem from varying perspectives.

Chapter IV: Research Findings

The purpose of this chapter is to present the data acquired from various stakeholders interviewed through focus groups and one-on-one interviews. This research study examined educators’ perceptions towards federally mandated educational policy changes that impacted their daily work lives. Commentary from various participants including teachers, assistant
principals and the school principal provides a perspective of how past and current federal policy has influenced and shaped their perceptions of federal, state and local educational initiatives.

In this chapter, the first section presents the purpose of the case study. The next section provides background information about the context of the research study. The last three sections present the emergent themes as identified through a careful analysis of the focus group and interview questions in relation to the research questions. The final section of this chapter presents a brief summary of the research findings.

**Purpose of the Case Study**

The main objective of this research project was to investigate educators’ perceptions of federally mandated policy. The research study aimed to capture how educators perceive the impact of federal policy at the school level and determine how policy influences educators. The two reform efforts underway in Florida during the time of the study include a change to a new evaluation system and a shift in standards, and participants were asked about these initiatives as well. Regarding these two policy initiatives, the district decided on the Marzano Causal evaluation as the tool to assess teachers and, beginning in 2011, slowly began implementing the 60 indicators associated with the instrument. In addition, the state decided to adopt and implement the Common Core State Standards in 2010. Recently the state has changed its decision on the Common Core, changing the test associated with it and removing the word “common.” These two reform efforts are interrelated because the new evaluation requires an understanding of the standards combined with student success on the high-stakes state test. For this study interviews and focus groups were conducted with administrator and instructional staff
at a high-performing middle school located in Central Florida to inquire about their perspectives regarding federal and state policy directives in general and their perspectives of the two current previously mentioned policy directives mentioned above. In short, this case study sought to understand how teachers and administers at a particular middle school in a semi-affluent suburb of a large urban center in Florida perceive the continuous changes brought on through federal and state reform efforts and the positive and adverse characteristics of such policy efforts as perceived by educators.

**Study Context**

Southview Middle School (a pseudonym for the actual school) is a high performing middle school located in the middle of a high performing school district within Central Florida’s eastern band of school districts. The school district is rated as an “A” school district based on school’s test scores since the inception of district grades in 1999. In addition the district’s high schools have been ranked in the top 5% according to Newsweek magazine based on advanced Placement and IB tests taken by its students. SAT scores have ranked above the state and national average for close to 40 years. The school district also maintains a high graduation rate placing them within the top 10 school districts in Florida.

Southview Middle school is graded as an “A” school based on student test scores on the FCAT test. The school has maintained the “A” rating since it opened over a decade ago. According to the Florida Department of Education, on average Southview’s Reading, Math and Science FCAT scores for each grade level (6th, 7th and 8th) outperform the state’s average by 20%. Southview Middle School serves over 1,300 students in grade 6-8. The school maintains a
teaching staff of approximately 60 while the administrative staff consists of three assistant
principals, one administrative dean and one principal. The administrative staff work on the
essential duties within the school that include, but are not limited to, facilities, scheduling, hiring,
discipline, testing and teacher observations.

Data Acquisition and Coding

Three focus groups were conducted with teachers across the school, with 16-18 teachers
participating. Overall, 16 teachers participated in the focus group sessions. In addition,
individual interviews were conducted with each of the three assistant principals and the principal
of the school. Focus group sessions and interviews with participants were recorded, transcribed
and analyzed for emergent themes to identify participants’ perceptions of mandated educational
reform in Florida. Saldana describes a code in qualitative inquiry as a word or short phrase that
symbolically assigns a summative or salient, essence-capturing attribute for a portion of
language-based or visual data. Creswell (1998) points out through the data analysis spiral that
the coding process represents the heart of qualitative data analysis. Creswell further explains that
it is here where researchers define in detail, develop themes or dimensions through some
grouping, and provide an interpretation of their own views of perspectives in the literature.

Saldana (2009) describes the continual process of coding as First Cycle and
Second Cycle coding. In Vivo coding was used for First Cycle Coding and Axial coding was
used for Second Cycle coding methods. Saldana describes In Vivo coding as literal or verbatim
coding which refers to a word or short phrase from the actual language found in qualitative data.
Creswell defines In Vivo coding as a process that utilizes the language of the participants to
guide the researcher in the development of codes, which are identified with short descriptors. In Vivo coding, as suggested by Creswell, requires the researcher to systematically compare and contrast qualitative data yielding complex and inclusive categories.

Saldana (2009) defines the goal of Axial Coding as a way to strategically reassemble data that were split during the initial coding process. The “axis” of Axial Coding, as explained by Saldana, is a category (similar to the axis of a wooden wheel with extended spokes) differentiated during the First Cycle coding. Charmaz (2006) states the process of Axial Coding relates categories to subcategories and specifies the properties and dimensions of a category. Glaser (1978) indicates with Axial Coding grouping similarly coded data and relabeling them into conceptual categories reduces the number of Initial Codes and allows the researcher to sort and relabeled into codes which become clearer and sharper.

**Research Question # 1: How do leaders and educators at a medium-sized middle school in Central Florida perceive the positive and detrimental impact of federal and state mandated reforms?**

Responses to Research Question #1 were discussed with the schools’ instructional faculty and leadership team. The themes identified in Table 1 were arrived at through a close analysis of the transcripts from focus groups and interviews of participating staff.

Table 1

*Themes in relation to the question: How do leaders and educators at a medium-sized middle school in Central Florida perceive the positive and detrimental impact of federal and state mandated reforms?*
- Educators feel that they are no longer in control
- Ongoing, rapid change with minimal preparation for implementation
- Pressure as a result of standardized testing
- Educators have become more aware of their students
- Renewed focus on reading

**Educators felt like they are no longer in control.** Teachers and administrators collectively discussed the implications from the state and district brought on through No Child Left Behind. Teachers and administrators began to lose a sense of autonomy. On a federal level the loss of control was felt through changes in teacher certification requirements. At the district level teachers were now required to create and maintain a whiteboard which displayed how their daily lessons tied to the state benchmarks. Looking at the loss of independence that teachers felt at a school-level many principals introduced a prescribed curriculum.

Curriculum changed, in particular textbooks and instructional materials offered to districts from publishers became fixed. Teachers were no longer able to just use their professional judgment; instead they were required to teach the benchmarks that were tied to the state test. Teachers often felt they were no longer teaching instead, they were “teaching to the test.” At times the teacher manuals stated verbatim what the teachers were required to say to the class. As one teacher described how her former school utilized a scripted reading program, “The announcement would go, a couple of kids would scurry to their reading class for 90 minutes, and it was timed. If the principal walks in at 9:37 you need to be here in the script. It was very scripted.”
The district began to request that teachers set their whiteboards up in a specific way known as the “common board configuration”. The purpose was for teachers to demonstrate how their lessons were covering the state benchmarks and essentially prove that their classroom was preparing students for the state test. Every teacher in the district was now required to have an identical whiteboard with learning goals, benchmarks, homework and lessons placed strategically on the board. Although this seemed arbitrary, teachers articulated irritation that this common board was now part of the evaluation. At any given moment administration could walk in their classroom and assess their teaching based on what was on the common board. The board allowed principals to see what was being taught, how it was supporting the state standards and if the learning goal was relevant to the lesson. Suddenly a whiteboard became a directive linked to effective teacher practices. As one teacher explained, “I was constantly being reminded that I have too much on my board.” If a learning goal was not posted, it was reflected in the teacher’s evaluation. If a teacher did not refer to the learning goal, it was reflected in the teacher’s evaluation. One teacher discussed frustratingly the implications of being partially evaluated on what was posted on a white board indicating the process as being stifling. The teacher pointed out, “I don’t want it to be robotic, it kind of seemed like, all right. I'm going through the motions at that time. I do see benefits from it though whether it's a quick, you know, 10-second scan of the classroom.” The implications of a common board carried over into the current Marzano teacher evaluation. Teachers are required, as part of their observation, to list state standards, learning goals and explicitly discuss these learning goals.

Teachers felt much time and energy was spent on this common board which was
not practical in the classroom. If a teacher taught multiple grade levels they expended too much energy trying to determine, on a daily basis, how to incorporate what the district wanted on their whiteboards. As one teacher of multiple grade levels explained, “In my case I teach three different reading classes so I have three different sets of homework that were required on the board.” Another teacher with multiple classes expressed how this new requirement worked in the classroom. As she stated,

I did the support consultation as well as co-taught but then I also have the self-contained classes, but I shared a classroom with a science teacher and I'm teaching math and teaching different levels so I actually had to have a dry-erase board. Put it up and take it down because you have some with the multiple common boards

The sense of losing control was also impacted by the expectation of the new state requirements towards teacher certification. The state kept changing the requirements for teacher certification in an attempt to keep them “highly qualified” under No Child Left Behind. The problem was many school districts and administration at the school level interpreted these changes differently. Countless middle school teachers were asked by principals to obtain certification in “middle grades integrated curriculum” which allows the teacher to teach any subject. The benefit would be that when they are completing the master schedule it provides a larger pool of qualified teachers. The state then decided to eliminate that as a certification so principals, needing reading teachers, requested teachers obtain a reading certification. As one teacher expressed,
When I started, I just had to have the EMC certification. Well then, “Oh, no. You're in a middle school and you have to be able to teach all subject areas.” So, the middle school integrated certification I got. Well, “No, you need to go out and qualified, so you need reading. So, the now the reading endorsement. Next it was, Oh, no, no. We heard that it was easy for you. Now I have to have an ASD endorsement.

Reform efforts throughout the state of Florida, predicated by No Child Left Behind brought on a sense that educators no longer had the control over their profession as they once had. Teachers no longer felt self-sufficient in day-to-day decision-making within their classroom. The impact was felt in subtle ways, such as a common board that became a daily struggle to determine if they were in compliance. Teachers now were required to conform to directives from the district as to how their classroom and curriculum were set up. Also, educators had to comply with the new requirements from the state to remain “highly qualified.”

**Pressure as a result of standardized testing.** Teachers and administrators expressed profound exasperation over the widespread pressure of high stakes testing grounded in No Child Left Behind. The implications of one state mandated exam was wide-spread affecting teachers and students. Students now risked being held back in third grade or not receiving a high school diploma based on a single performance on a state test. As such, the test informed many decisions made within a school. As one teacher commented, “The state not the administration started to mandate the classes students have because of the FCAT.” The test became the focus of the school. As one teacher explained, “I could see that the focus totally changed.” Another teacher pointed out the high-stakes testing added “a lot of extra pressure.”
Adding to the pressure, students were expected to be proficient on the state test by 2014 a goal assistant principals discussed as unrealistic. As one administrator stated, “No Child Left Behind had a big impact because we had to, by this year, get everything proficient, which is never going to happen.” Assistant principals discussed the challenge attached to the word “proficient” adding:

I would like to say for No Child Left Behind I think the additional disconnect is the language of the terminology from the federal level. You know all children must be proficient. But then each state sets its own level of proficiency against no national standard, against no national scale of rating. So the disconnect is that your federal government, make these statements of every child will be proficient. But then each state designs their own proficiency test? How can you compare state to state?

Teachers and assistant principals overwhelmingly discussed the pressure of the state test and the repercussions for students. Mandatory retention in Florida requires that all third grade students be “proficient” on the state test (FCAT) or be held back. Suddenly not only teachers were impacted but students were. As one assistant principal expressed “when the FCAT came, that's when you started having mandatory scores, mandatory retainment. If you didn't make the third grade levels you were retained.” Teachers were now under microscope and their instructional practices were scrutinized once test results were released. Teachers also explained that there was minimal professional development from the district and everything was rolled out too quickly without providing time to train teachers. One former third grade teacher commented on this as well stating,
It was very nerve wrecking because you know, number one it was a new tool. We had no exposure to it. Number two, you spend a whole year presenting this curriculum and from your observations and your assessments, you a feel particular student does have what it takes to move on, and then they get an assessment back from one day’s performance that says they're not.

As a result of the state test, many students that did not pass were now required to take additional classes for support. Special education teachers recognized their student population was often required to give up an elective for that class. As one special education teacher discussed,

Standards got harder and harder, so we're expected to do more with less time. Testing really impacted special education children in my opinion because, bless their hearts, they needed those electives and they need to run and they wouldn't have had any electives.

The repercussions were also felt at the high school level. High school students were now required to pass the FCAT in order to obtain a standard high school diploma, in the words of one former high school administrator, “with the high school requirements, that you had to pass certain tests, achieve certain scores, in order to get a high school diploma.” The assistant principal painted this bleak picture of a student dutifully attending school, passing classes yet never obtaining a diploma as a result of their performance on a state test. The assistant principal acknowledged the embarrassment felt by the student, teacher and school and questioned how this policy positively impacts students. The administrator stated,
That was a big change high schools gave out Certificates of Attendance. Literally, thank you very much for coming to high school for four years, but your FCAT scores did not meet the requirement. So they got a Certificate of Attendance.

Participants acknowledged with the high stakes state test both teachers and students were negatively impacted. Suddenly teachers faced scrutiny if their students did not perform and students risked being held back or not graduating with a standard diploma.

**Educators have become more aware of their students.** No Child Left Behind brought mandates which included standardized testing to the forefront and with that an increased focus on teachers knowing their student population. Despite the loss of autonomy and pressure brought on by federal initiatives teachers and administrators acknowledged that they have been forced to analyze their student population. For instance, teachers are often asked to focus their instructional practices to target the students that need the additional support such as their English Language Learners (ELL), special education and economically disadvantaged students. Teachers and administrators feel this has helped a population of students that were largely dismissed before. Title I funds provided the needed boost in funding so districts could hire more teachers or provide professional development opportunities. In discussing Title I one teacher commented, “Title I gave all kinds of money to the states and to the districts to make it possible to get more help for those kids who weren’t succeeding.”

One assistant principal discussed how teachers were able to differentiate instruction to support special education students. The assistant principal viewed this as eye-opening to many
teachers that did not understand the incongruities between the general education and special education students. The principal pointed out,

   No Child Left Behind had a greater impact. And as an ESE Administrator, while looking at our exceptional student education population, an even greater impact. Because when you looked at the data from that, it showed what the discrepancy was between the regular ed kids and our special needs kids.

   The principal recognized that schools needed to look at their student population and the relevancy of the curriculum presented to them. As a result school districts created magnet programs within the county that previously did not exist. As the principal commented on these schools stating, “Principals offered more electives, more up-to-date, and more practical work experience and electives for students.” School districts attempted to think outside of the box and create magnet programs that attempted to offer hands on practical application of skills. The principal described the benefits adding, “We had an architect and we hired a real architect to teach the program. We had an aerospace program, a modeling and simulation program. They had an aerospace person which was a retired military Air Force person.” The principal felt these magnet programs were a success and continues to be a success within the district. She pointed out, “They’ve all been successful. The magnets are remaining bigger. The kids are lasting for years.”

   The principal did express that the focus of new federal policies under No Child Left Behind required teachers to analyze their curriculum and determine if they were providing an education that prepared students for college and careers. The principal elaborated by stating,
“No Child Left Behind, that’s our whole big accountability in the testing. I really think it has given our teachers a focus.” The principal further explained that teachers could no longer cherry pick their lessons based on personal preference, or habit. The principal felt teachers often just inserted the same lesson year after year regardless of its relevancy or purpose for students’ long-term success. Reflecting on what a typical English class looked like before the reform effort the principal stated,

It never changed. Oh my gosh. What is it? One grade is Romeo and Juliet. One grade is Julius Caesar. It never changed. It never fluctuated. Even when I came to middle school, there was a teacher that taught the diary of Anne Frank for nine weeks, the last nine weeks. They aren’t focusing on the skills. They’re focusing on what happened to Anne Frank. While that’s a great story and it has a lot of personal value, it’s not what we need to be teaching our students, that we need to teach them skills.

Teachers and administrators acknowledged that educational policy changed to force them to better understand their student population. Teachers now examined their instructional strategies to adapt to their students’ needs and were forced to change their curriculum.

**Renewed focus on reading.** When discussing the impact of federal policies on teachers and administrators every focus group consistently brought up the positive and deleterious impact of a renewed focus on reading. Comments from focus groups brought out the far-reaching implications of having every student that did not score higher than a level three on the reading portion of the state test in a reading class. Something as innocuous as additional support for struggling readers changed hiring practices and altered student schedules. Reading
teachers pointed out the positive aspects largely because of the nature of their work and because it provided a job for them. For example, one reading teacher stated, “I have a reading job because of No Child Left Behind.” One assistant principal commented on how this new idea swept through the district and took over causing a feeling of being overwhelmed. The assistant principal commented, “Reading came right in and took over. It came right in and just took over and swamped our district.”

The focus on reading impacted students’ schedules causing schools to add double blocks of reading. Districts were now forced to look at the FCAT data and determine which students were required to take an additional reading class. Students were keenly aware that they risked being placed in a double-block of reading and will lose an elective based on their performance on one test. As one teacher explained, “all kids who are level one or two on the FCAT ... because we had FCAT standards ... Based on their scores on the FCAT they all had to be in a reading program, an intensive reading program, if they were level one and two.” Teachers expressed frustration that reading classes became such a focal point in the district causing schools to rearrange bell schedules to accommodate the new reading classes. Many schools switched from a six period bell schedule to a seven period bell schedule to have room for the influx of reading classes that they needed to add. Teachers were keenly aware that adding an extra class to the schedule cut down on their instruction time in each class. One teacher remarked, “Some students have to have two periods of reading and then you also have the intensive math. Then you’re also required to have PE so they moved from that six-period
schedule to the seven-period schedule, which then means that the academic classes you have then have less amount of time.”

Special education teachers pointed out that their student population, particularly, saw the adverse implications of placing students in additional reading classes. They expressed that special education students suffered the most because these students did not score high on the state test and now were forced to lose electives such as band or physical education. As one teacher stated, “It really impacted special education children in my opinion because, they needed those electives.” Students were also overloaded with reading and language arts classes. Some students were given a double-blocked reading class on top of their core language arts class as a result, three classes in one day were dedicated to the reading standards for the state. Students were burned out from spending so much time each day in reading classes. In addition, one teacher commented that some schools eliminated a class like social studies for some students in order to add in a reading class. The teacher commented, “At one point they would do it where they would not have social studies because they only had six periods. They would do reading instead of social studies.”

Teachers also expressed that the intense focus on reading by schools created gaps of knowledge in other subjects for students. One teacher commented, “It's almost like they're losing background information.” Teachers pointed out that students are coming to class without some basic skills because so much time has been spent focused on reading. As one teacher expressed, “They're better readers but before you can start teaching some material you have to
teach background, in order for them to understand. They're missing science.” Another teacher reaffirmed how this policy negatively impacted students:

At one point they would do it where they were would not have social studies because they only had six periods. They would do reading instead of social studies. I can tell that in my classrooms, because if you start talking about the seasons of the year, those that were pulled out that needed extra help in reading or math know nothing about the seasons of the year or why we have day and night.

The renewed focus on reading as a result of No Child Left Behind had wide scale implications for teachers and students. Mandating students that scored low on the state test to take a reading class impacted school bell schedules and student schedules. Some students no longer had an elective missing classes like band or physical education. Teachers acknowledge that the intense focus on reading had left gaps in their students’ knowledge.

**Research Question #2: How does leadership and staff of Southview Middle School perceive the positive and deleterious impact of the most recent federal and state mandates to adopt the Common Core State Standards and engage in the Marzano teacher evaluation process?**

Recently reform efforts in the wake of Race to the Top have focused on moving to a national set of standards and revamping how teachers are being evaluated. As a result, Florida adopted the Common Core State Standards which replaced the current Next Generation Sunshine State Standards. In addition, the state of Florida has abandoned the old state test
(FCAT) to be replaced by an undetermined state test. As a result, Florida revamped their method of teacher evaluation allowing districts to decide how they will evaluate teachers. Many districts opted for the Marzano Causal teacher evaluation.

Responses to Research Question 2 were discussed with Southview’s instructional and leadership team. Emergent themes are broken up between the Marzano Causal Evaluation system and Common Core State Standards, as presented in Table 2.

Table 2

*Themes identified from an analysis of teachers’ responses to questions about the Marzano Causal Evaluation tool and the Common Core State Standards*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marzano Causal Evaluation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Teachers are feeling pressure</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Time-consuming</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Inconsistency amongst schools and administrators</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Gaps in training</td>
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<tr>
<td>• More accountability</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Educators deem this is what “good” educators already do (beneficial for training purposes)</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Educators understand that this policy is advantageous in the pursuit of student achievement</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Common Core State Standards</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Information from the state is inconsistent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Trainings are erratic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The state is widely criticized for implementation process of both federal mandates</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Teachers are feeling pressure.** Both teachers and administrators expressed that the new teacher evaluation from the district has brought with it an elevated amount of pressure from the district and school. The school district began implementing the new evaluation in 2011. Each district that chose to use the Marzano evaluation implemented it differently. Teachers and administrators are bothered by the lack of substantial training on a district level. There appeared to be inconsistencies with how administration was trained as opposed to teachers. Administration received a more comprehensive training within the district and in some cases were afforded opportunities to train while conducting classroom evaluations. Teachers were trained sporadically at the district however; much of the training was left to individual schools. Teachers commented the frustration of being referred to the Marzano online website iObservation which provides some web based video training.

Teachers feel the district rolled out the new evaluation tool quickly without allowing teachers time to adjust. The transition was insufficient and little preparation was done on a district-level. As one teacher commented, “first year, they should’ve kept the old system for evaluation while they were incorporating the new one.” Teachers felt the district hastily executed the process and felt thrown in. Another teacher expressed, “I think they did the rollout too fast.” The district initially utilized a portion of the evaluation as the focus in the first year. Teachers believed that the process would be slow allowing them to be trained and familiarize their classroom with this extensive new process. Teachers were discouraged when the trainings were scaled back and their evaluators were now utilizing the sixty indicators within the form. One teacher expressed the pressure of suddenly being evaluated on the all of the new indicators. As
she stated, “In the beginning, in the first year… about three years ago, we had a smaller amount that we were required to be responsible for and focus on. I think at that point because they did scale it down, it didn’t seem as overwhelming.” One teacher described the stress felt when all of the indicators were suddenly used towards the evaluation which addresses how the district rolled the process out and that there are too many indicators within the evaluation for teachers to remember. As she stated,

I was freaking out. That was the year they kept adding and I'm like, “What? There's more?” I don’t know. It just never dawned on me that they would add to them. Like, “This is easy. I can handle that.” And then, “What?” I was in their office and I'm like, “I just don’t know how I handle it because I'm trying to remember all of these.”

Teachers also addressed pressure as a result of the subjective nature of administrative walk-throughs during an evaluation. Teachers felt that evaluations are inconsistent based on which administrator is evaluating. Teachers understand that their evaluations will change depending on the school location and the administrator. Teachers within the focus group collectively expressed dissatisfaction when learning that some schools appear to be lenient with the walk-throughs than others. Many teachers knew personally other teachers within the district that did not have as many administrative walk-throughs and were consistently rated as “highly effective” even though they felt it was inaccurate. As one teacher explained, One of the challenges is that the evaluations, like the walkthroughs, they're incredibly subjective because there was one time, and I was in a classroom and then my administrator walked in. It was during
a time where my students were quietly working, and I just assigned what they were to do and I said, “Okay, go.” I'm just kind of standing in the room, and I got a Needs Improvement for it.

Administrative walk-throughs are frequent and ongoing and many teachers understand that their evaluation may be impacted based on what is happening the moment the administrator walks in. Teachers expressed that classrooms can be unpredictable and to have an evaluation based solely on one moment was not fair. As one teacher explained, “At any given point, the administration can find something positive in the classroom. At any given point, they can find something negative in the classroom.” Teachers expressed an unwillingness to put on a performance just for an administrator and feel many teachers in other schools do this, as expressed by a teacher, “When they walk in, I'm not just going to suddenly put on a show. I'm just going to keep doing what I do because I don’t want it to be like a show.” Another teacher commented,

I would say that there was one teacher who put on that show who did not use the indicators when the principal was not in the classroom. The second the principal stepped inside that classroom, put on every tool, did the Kagan, did … made it look perfect and was, let’s just say had a high position in teaching. It was something that I did respect in this person but in that area, I was very disappointed and sort of put off. It made me even consider what makes teaching worth it.

Teachers expressed their frustrations over the rapid pace that the district launched the new evaluation. Teachers expressed that the district should have added the indicators slowly allowing time for professional development. In addition, teachers conveyed that the evaluation is
deemed as subjective allowing teachers to be evaluated on a small portion of their lesson when an administrator walks through.

**Time-consuming.** The new teacher evaluation requires administrators to evaluate teachers on the Marzano Causal framework. The evaluative tool is research-based and consists of sixty indicators considered to be the basis of effective instructional practice. Teachers are expected to cover every indicator within the evaluation. Teachers and administrators both pointed to the problem of having such an extensive and time-consuming evaluation. Teachers discussed how much time the evaluation takes to successfully navigate. Teachers are required to pick an indicator that is the focus of the school year. That teacher is required to construct a plan which includes instructional strategies that will be used to target that indicator. Teachers need to write a written reflection and discuss with their administrator strategies used for that indicator while also covering the rest of the indicators. In addition the new evaluation requires administrative staff to conduct lengthy a pre and post conference going over the final evaluation. Assistant principals in particular expressed frustration because the new evaluation requires a great deal of time dedicated to the process while they are still required to cover their other administrative duties.

Teachers expressed that the new Marzano evaluation is time-consuming often taking away valuable instruction time. The problem with the evaluation centers on the overwhelming amount of indicators that teachers are required to cover. Teachers are finding that their time is being wasted on trivial aspects of an evaluation instead of being able to plan and execute a lesson. One teacher explained, “It takes away from our instruction time. It really kills
us.” Another teacher expressed, “It's a nightmare. It's just too much. Again I think the idea of it is a good idea but I think sometimes it takes away the time.” Lastly another teacher commented, “It takes up too much time. That's taking away from planning.”

One of the concerns with the new evaluation is the requirement of scales in the classroom. Through the new evaluation system teachers are required to implement a four-point scale that is directly related to the learning goal. Students are required to track their progress on a scale and reflect on their understanding of the learning goal. Teachers acknowledged that there is minimal value to the process of these scales. Every subject has a scale and for language arts teachers are working with two separate writing scales along with a reading scale. One language arts teacher commented on the multiple scales that are required to teach the subject, It's a nightmare. It's just too much. Again I think the idea of it is a good idea but I think sometimes it takes away the time. I also find it entertaining when I'm doing writing because I then have my scale, my four-point scale. I then have my five-point scale and for the Six Traits of Writing I can have a six-point scale for the FCAT writing. Everybody, have all three of your scales out and rate yourselves.

Teachers are required to discuss these scales with students and have students track their progress at the beginning, middle and end of a lesson to determine their understanding of the learning goals. The language is often mired in standards-based jargon that students cannot understand. Also, teachers discussed that students openly state that they rarely pay attention to the scales and just perform for the teachers showing an initial low score on the scale then a high score to demonstrate growth, regardless if it is accurate. One teacher expressed that students have
commented that the discussion of both the learning goals and scales offers no significance towards understanding the lesson:

Yes, I see the benefit of it but like you said the time wasted of doing it, because asking the kids a general question about, "Does this help you in all your classes?" and they're all, "Oh no, this doesn't work. This is not helping me become a better student."

The principal also recognized that the Marzano Causal evaluation process is time consuming from an administrative standpoint. Administration is required to conduct pre and post conferences in addition to the frequent classroom observations. As she stated,

It’s quite a lot because it takes, a formal observation, can take us up to four hours or more. You figured the hour for pre-conference, the hour we’d sit in your classroom, the hour for post-conference. It takes two hours and more just to write this up.

Another assistant principal further explained the time-consuming process. Administrators now have to be mindful of their calendar to ensure that they are adhering to their schedule. As one assistant principal noted, “With Marzano, just to reiterate it requires an enormous amount of time on the administrator. And it requires scheduling. I mean you have to schedule your calendar, and you just have to tell people no I can't, I have walk-throughs.” One assistant principal also discussed the new evaluation tool as, “another huge splice that has to be inserted into the pie of everything we already have to do.” As another assistant principal detailed:

With the new evaluation, I spend an hour pre-conference. Usually at least an hour observing. Two to three hours writing. And that’s been paired down, because I know what
I'm doing now. Another hour post-conference. You're talking five, six, seven hours per
teacher, on top of all our normal, regular duties.

The new Marzano evaluation instrument requires administrators to take time from their
usual duties to conduct evaluative walkthroughs. Administrators feel they have less time to focus
on their job because of this time-consuming process. In addition, administrators are required to
conduct conferences as well as input the evaluations into an online database.

Teachers are now required to implement the instructional strategies into their daily practice.

**Inconsistency amongst schools and administrators.** Teachers expressed a
feeling that the district did not set consistent guidelines amongst all of the schools. As a result,
teachers experience variances with the way they are evaluated. In some cases teachers might
have one evaluation during the year while in other schools they might see administrators once a
week during the school-year. Teachers acknowledged that evaluative practices appear to vary
from school to school and as such teachers perceive this as an inconsistency that exists with the
new evaluation process. It is difficult for teachers to trust a process that is not consistent which
they perceive as unfair.

The new evaluation was designed for teachers only and does not address reading
coaches, deans or any other instructional positions. One reading coach explained that the since
new evaluation only addressed teachers they were required to form committees to create
guidelines for their evaluations. As she stated, “They had no form for guidance counselors, no
form for deans, no form for coaches of any kind, behavior specialists at elementary schools.”

The dean elaborated stating, “What they allowed us to do is we formed all of these little
committees and we met at the county office, and we created our own form.” Teachers are largely unaware of this and would appreciated to have that type of input into their evaluation. Teachers expressed concern over the validity of evaluations conducted by administrative staff that never had experience being evaluated by the same tool. Teachers stated that they do not appreciate being observed by someone who never experienced the same level of evaluation. One teacher felt there would be a deeper-level of understanding if the evaluating administrator had experience commenting, “the administrators that we have now who are using this system to evaluate us have never taught under the system”. Another teacher agreed stating, “How do you know that they are evaluating you properly when they have never had to do those things?”

Support facilitators work inside a general education classroom to support special education students find the new evaluation system complicated, given their role in the classroom is not traditional. District-wide there never seems to be a concrete understanding of a support facilitator’s role in the classroom a problem that has carried over into the evaluation. One support facilitator expressed that she is evaluated on the same indicators as teachers, “Even though I am the support facilitator, I'm still expected to do all of those and meet all of those indicators as much as the regular education teachers, as much as any other teacher.” As such, special education teachers in this role have been met with discrepancies over their evaluation stemming from a lack of understanding to what the standards are for them. These teachers feel that they never fully understand what they should be doing during the evaluation. One teacher stated,
“We've all been told different things. We have no standards to go by.” While another special education teacher said, “How do you know you’ve met the standards? I don’t know what the standards are.”

Teachers in the role of support facilitator also discussed that the expectations are inconsistent. Support facilitators do not always take over the class and instruct students, something that is difficult to evaluate however, they are often asked to teach the class during the evaluation. One teacher argued, “Somebody will say, “Do exactly what you normally would do regardless of the room,” and somebody will say, “No, that general education teacher will sit down, and you will teach the class,” even if that might be a class that has never been you're role.”

Another teacher pointed to the district and the timeline of the rollout as the issue, I think it was really kind of arrogant on the part of the county to assume that the administrators could walk in on day one of this new implementation and start assessing people, and their performance based on this new method when they didn’t know any more about it than the teachers did. I kind of figure it was a little arrogant to think that I should know more than, you know, anybody else knows simply because I'm an AP walking into a room performing evaluations. I definitely agree with that. The roll out could’ve been better.

Teachers also expressed that they are aware of the discrepancies in other schools within the district. There is an acknowledgement of the subjective nature of the evaluations based on the school or the administrator. Many teachers discussed how some schools are very strict with
the new evaluation while other schools are more lenient. Again teachers do not trust an
evaluative tool that demonstrates such inconsistencies based on the school and administrator
cconducting the evaluation. As one teacher pointed out,

    If you're highly effective, you're highly effective because of these indicators. I know
people that came from a school that they got all highly effective pluses in everything, even
when the teacher themselves said, "I'm not highly effective plus in this. The teachers did
dspecify even with the inconsistencies within the district, and at times with the school they are
aware of the conscience efforts the administrative team within Southview makes to remain
consistent. One teacher commented, “I think the administrative team here has worked really,
really hard over the last couple of years to get rid of those variants.” The principal
acknowledged these variations amongst schools and administrators pointing out the unusually
high amount of teachers in the county rated as highly effective,

    “Unfortunately, this is the third year. There are a lot of highly effective teachers in this county.”

The principal explained the disconnect in the amount of teachers within the district rated as
highly effective and school test scores, “There’s not a match of highly effective teachers all
across the board and we have a B, a C, or a D school.” Assistant principals understand there is a
level of subjectivity that did not exist with the previous evaluation. Assistant principals’
comments were: “there was a lot less subjectivity with the old evaluation,” and “these new
indicators are difficult from a supervisor's position. Monitoring can be subjective. It can be very
subjective.”
The new evaluation is perceived as inconsistent because it is subjective in nature. Special education teachers expressed confusion as to how their role in the classroom fits with the evaluation tool. In addition, both teachers and administrators acknowledged that the inconsistencies are present district-wide.

**Gaps in training.** The training on the new evaluation system was inconsistent within the district. The district has provided teachers with in-service professional development workshops at the central district however, not all of the teachers have been trained there. Teachers commented that the district-held trainings were ineffective and felt it wasted time. Some of the educators within the district have attended a Marzano based seminar sponsored by the Learning Sciences Marzano Center. The teachers that attended remarked that these seminars did not provide any practical skills for the classroom. Administration discussed that middle schools were afforded an outside consultant that the district paid out-of-pocket to train administration on the evaluation process through hands-on activities. The price of this consultant was high however, the principal pointed out that this consultant was the most effective trainer for the new evaluation process.

One common thread amongst both teachers and administrators is the inconsistence with trainings offered by the school district for the new evaluation system. Teachers discussed the trainings at the district level do not offer practical application. Teachers consistently agreed that the trainings at the district level are not useful. One teacher explained, “I haven’t had the training that I would like to have had on it and you know, just some more clarification.” Another teacher stated, “Domain 4 though with the hypothesis and testing, and all
of that. It's a new one this year. That one I haven't had very much training on it.” There is an understanding from teachers that the district provided administrative staff more training as one teacher explained, “I think as the administration has had more training and more practice, and they’ve had the opportunity to learn this stuff, too.”

New or returning teachers feel they are thrown into this new system with little understanding of how to navigate the process. Often they are referred to iObservation which is a Marzano-based site that contains their observation information as well as videos. Teachers feel this is not enough especially since these evaluations are so critical to their jobs. Florida terminated teacher tenure in 2011 and any new or returning teacher do not have the option of a professional services contract which is often referred to teacher tenure. For new and returning teachers the stakes are even higher and they are not feeling supported. One teacher that left education and returned commented on the lack of training for new or returning teachers within the district,

As a returning teacher and it was being rolled out in like I said in 2008-2009, I had no training. I really haven't had any Marzano training. I haven't had anything. I think getting on iObservation and looking at videos is it.

A new teacher discussed the frustration as a new teacher to this process, “There was massive panic, confusion, and chaos. We really didn’t have direction yet. Eventually, it was, “Oh, by the way, we have iObservation,” where you can go in and look at some of these indicators and watch video clips.” Another new teacher explained that training was not part of
the new teacher training program within the district stating, “I don’t think they really prepared me. I was just kind of thrown into it.”

Teachers expressed that the quality of the trainings vary depending on who is conducting them. District-level professional development, teachers explained, offered less practical training. Teachers feel the district trainers are out of touch with the realities of the classroom and also have never been evaluated using the same instrument. On teacher explained, “Basically they are summarizing and regurgitating the book. I’ve read the book. I don’t need you to do that.” Another teacher commented, “They put up PowerPoints and read it to us” and “The people presenting from the county haven't taught using this.”

One consistency amongst participants is the quality of trainings provided when they are conducted by current teachers. One teacher explained,

The trainings by our cluster are actually teachers - elementary, middle and high school - that are currently teaching that are then focusing on one DQ like DQ5 or whatever…. That has been much more helpful. They are breaking it down and giving us actual practical skills.

Another teacher felt the district jumped on the bandwagon, instead of deliberately providing the needed trainings stating,

I think their first approach, because again we’re not leading in any way, was jump on the bandwagon. This is something new. Let’s do it. Let’s start it. Let’s get on this before other counties. I think their thought behind it, they had good intentions but it's definitely lacking.
Finally, one teacher expressed the benefit of the new evaluation tool and the requirement to work collaboratively. This teacher feels that there is a level of professional development embedded in the new evaluation that allows teachers to collaborate. As this teacher indicated,

I love that component that our county kind of pushed through and said, you know, we’re going to do PLCs because of this. It's an indicator.” That part, I would never give that up. I would fight for that any day just to have that PLC talking time. That’s where I feel, if I'm learning all these things from everybody else, I can then put it back into my classroom and know, that’s this indicator, and this indicator, and this indicator and presenting it a different way.

The principal discussed the preparation that took place from an administrator/principal perspective which included being part of the committee which included teachers and administrators for the initial launch, “First of all I served on the principal or the administration teacher committee which means that was a collaborative effort where they would put about 30 people on that committee. We decided the technicalities of it.” Initially the district seemed mindful of how the new system was being rolled out and did include some teacher input although most teachers feel it was not enough. The principal further elaborated on what those committees discussed during the initial phase of the new evaluation,

How many indicators should we look at? First of all we decided on what model. I was on that administrative group. Then there was a big teacher group. Then there was an overall mixed group once it got rolling. I was on the committee just to look which model would be the best. Obviously, it was a dark cloud that we were all walking through. We didn’t
really know what this is all about. If we would learn new indicators or mandate, it was very transparent. We’d push it out.

The district hired an outside consultant to help teach middle school administrators on the new evaluation process. The principal commented that this was vital to set the district apart, “I know they don’t, have had the in-depth training that middle school people have had.” The principal signified how beneficial this person was to learning how to conduct administrative walk-throughs as part of the new evaluation, “He keeps us focused. He creates a sense of urgency”. The principal elaborated further with how this consultant provided training on the new evaluation:

You could use him however you wanted to use him. You can use him and walk around, go into classroom and do a walkthrough with him. When you do a walk with him what you’ve missed is amazing. He helps you focus. He helps us collect our data.

Assistant principals expressed frustration with the type of training provided by both the state and the district. Districts throughout Florida have worked with the Marzano-based “Learning Sciences” training as part of the initial teacher and administrative trainings. These trainings were perceived by the assistant principals as grossly inadequate. As one assistant principal articulated,

Two full days on how to log into a system and check boxes and stuff like that seemed like a waste. And then seven full days on things where we would get a lot of answers like, "Well, we don't know about that yet. It's still a new system.
In the Marzano Causal evaluation teachers are ranked based on their rating from administrative walk-throughs. The ratings range from a needs improvement to highly-effective and the newly implemented highly effective plus, which stems from the overabundance of highly effectives the district was seeing. Assistant principals commented that no one can articulate what highly effective plus looks like in a classroom. One assistant principal stated, “Our answers for a highly effective plus from our trainers were, "Well it's something you've never before. You'll know it when you see it.” Another assistant principal expanded on this stating,

If you call Learning Sciences International and say, "Hey, what is innovating?” You're still not going to get a straight answer. And they're the ones creating this system for us to use. And they have a level of performance that they cannot clearly define.

Assistant principals echoed the sentiment of the principal agreeing that the outside consultant the district provided was beneficial. Assistant principals described the hands-on approach that the consultant provided. As one stated, “We just walk in people's classroom. And it's much more real-world applicable, because then we all talk about it back at like a conference room setting.” While another explained, “We compare notes, and we make sure we're coding the same way when we're taking notes.” Another assistant principal clarified the difference between the Learning Science training through Marzano and the consultant the district hires. The consultant who conducts trainings in the real-world environment stated,

There's 15 Assistant Principals from the district. We visit classrooms. We take it indicator by indicator and figure out what things should look like and we put all that in common understanding. Much more of an effective training than say the Learning
Science International one. Because he'll quantify, "Well, a Highly Effective Plus or an Innovating should look like this." Where you know it's completely based on his research and his opinion, and at least we get a definition.

Assistant principals also acknowledged that the flow of information is inconsistent. One stated, “The other thing where I don't think it’s working is developing common understanding top to bottom.” This affirms teachers concerns that their evaluations vary based on the school and administrator conducting the evaluations. The district has not provided administrative staff with an understanding of how to consistently conduct evaluations so there is more inter rater-reliability within the district. Another assistant principal addressed the discrepancies from the state and district with trainings for teachers,

We all go to intensive training on this; teachers don't. And we have the training that we provide here at the school. So while I may have a very great understanding of what indicator 14 says, I can't rely on all 31 of my teachers having that same understanding. Teachers and administrators acknowledged the gaps in training on the new evaluation system. Administrators appear to of had more comprehensive training with the benefit from the outside consultant. Teachers expressed the need for teacher training which they feel provides them with real-world skills.

More accountability. The Marzano teacher evaluation proved instructional practice on many aspects of teaching. The instrument looks at how teachers segment lessons, address content, engage students, plan and prepare, reflect and work with others. Teachers agreed that the new evaluation system provides a level of accountability for both teachers and
administrators that did not exist before. Teachers feel even though this is a time-consuming process it has benefitted them to look closer at their instructional practices. Teachers are now required to examine their lessons and instructional practices. Teachers are expected to provide feedback to students and monitor their learning while they work collaboratively.

One teacher commented during a lesson the Marzano indicators provide her with accountability, “I'm at a point where just constantly being aware of these things. I need to probably provide background information at times. I need to push them to dig deeper. I need to be aware when they're not engaged certainly.” One teacher explained the level of ownership required to learn the new evaluation tool, “I did watch several videos, and I read what was in iObservation. I signed up for a three-day workshop.” One teacher stated that this new evaluation requires administration to have a much more hands on approach. Teachers feel this is providing proof that they are really being coached and are provided with feedback from their administrator. As she indicated, “I do feel that they're finally doing their job. Now we're getting documentation that they've done something.”

Administrative staff discussed the new level of accountability brought on by increased walk-throughs and pre and post conferences. One assistant principal stated, “teachers think it's a lot more accountability on them. But it's also the same increased accountability on us.” Assistant principals elaborated on the new system which requires a certain amount of walkthroughs with each teacher, “we're tracked for how often we're seeing teachers. And we're tracked to make sure that we're providing quality feedback in a timely manner.” One assistant principal discussed the
ongoing practice of inter-related reliability which requires administrative staff frequently conduct classroom observations to determine if everyone is consistent with scores. As she illustrated,

As far as I know, it's the first time I've ever done any inter-related reliability as far as being supervisors and administering an evaluation tool. You know before Marzano, I mean let's just be legit. If somebody came to your room once or twice a year, that's no big deal.

Teachers expressed the benefits that this new evaluation brings into the classroom. The teachers expressed that they are more mindful of their lessons and how it ties in with the indicators. Administration acknowledged that as a school they do focus on creating consistencies amongst administrative staff.

**Educators deem this is what “good” educators already do (beneficial for training purposes).** The initial purpose of the Marzano Causal framework is to provide teachers with effective teaching practices. Teachers within the Focus Groups conveyed that the new Marzano Causal Evaluation system provides an understanding of what “good teaching” should look like in a classroom. Many teachers pointed out that the new evaluation system is nothing new to them and only highlights what effective teaching practices look like. Some teachers also expressed that the new evaluation tool reminds them of what is needed. As one teacher articulated, “It's made me more aware of what I could do to improve my teaching skills.”

Teachers also stated that the evaluation is a great resource to train teachers. Teachers see the value in the Marzano Causal framework and expressed understanding that it understands the complexities of teaching. As one teacher explained, “I think as far as training and instruction, I
think it’s amazing for that.” Many teachers feel this evaluation tool would benefit new teachers entering the field. Another teacher discussed the benefits for new teachers specifying, “First of all, when I was a first year teacher just starting out, I wish it would've been in place.” The teacher further explained that the evaluation system is an ongoing resource in the classroom to guide teaching saying,

Oh, this is what good teaching looks like. This is the things I should be doing. I mean, it's like your bible. I mean, you have it there. You don’t do anything without it. It's right there, right next to my instructional plan and my Marzano book are together. You don’t plan anything without going through those first.

While the teachers acknowledged the benefits of the evaluation tool as a way to train teachers they collectively agreed that it should never be used to evaluate teachers. One teacher did state that while this system is a good resource for training it should not be used as an evaluation tool, “I think for training purposes, it works really well. I think there are some things on there that don’t work when you're trying to evaluate.”

The assistant principals also discussed the new evaluation as a resource for new teachers and a guide to good teaching. One assistant principal indicated,

Good teaching is good teaching. And good teachers do well. I think Marzano is even to help good teachers get better. But also to work with teachers that aren't doing so well.

You know, because now you have concrete things that you're looking at.

The principal commented on the new evaluation requires more of a dialogue
between administration and teachers, “I also think too with this evaluation system the requirement of the pre-conference and the post-conference is beneficial. It’s built on feedback. Feedback has to be continuous.” One assistant principal also noted that the new evaluation requires a level of communication, trust and collaboration that did not exist before,

And I think one of the biggest differences with Marzano, it's more continuous. You know it's a continuous cycle. It's not once a year, twice a year, three times and a year. It's a continuous cycle. I think it is about establishing a rapport with teachers, getting to know teachers. You know they have to feel that they can trust you, that you have good intentions. And it’s a team, it's a collaborative effort.

Teachers and administrators agreed that the new evaluation provides instructional strategies that are the basis of effective teaching. Teachers expressed that the evaluation is an excellent resource for training, but not as a tool for evaluation. Administration discussed the collaborative nature built into the instrument that provides teachers with ongoing feedback.

**Educators understand that this policy is advantageous in the pursuit of student achievement.** The reason for the new evaluation is the improvement of student achievement. The district and the state of Florida wanted districts to provide an evaluation for a teacher that is comprehensive and geared towards students’ learning outcomes. Teachers and administrative staff agreed that the end result of the Marzano teacher evaluation system is student success. As discussed, teachers can see the value in what the Marzano indicators focus on and believe it is good teaching. Teachers also agreed that the new evaluation provides a needed focus on instructional and professional practices that will translate into student success.
One teacher expressed, “I think it will help student achievement,” And another pointed out, “I think it's raised everything to a higher level. We're really looking at the art and the science of what we are doing.”

A few teachers expressed that the new requirements within the Marzano indicators such as discussing learning goals with students and utilizing scales to track student progress helps students take ownership of their learning. Teachers were not required to have a conversation about learning goals or the relevancy of a lesson with students. As one teacher explained, “I think it's got some really good stuff in there that is beneficial not just for the teachers but for the students.” Another teacher commented on the learning goal requirement stating, “The goals have become explicit.” Elaborating on the requirement for teachers to display the learning goal and discuss with students one teacher commented, Now we are having that discussion with students. Look, this is what I want you to be able to do at the end of it, instead of it being some sort of mystery for them, you know, trying to figure out what we’re supposed to be doing here. It's always reference point that we go back to. They're constantly reevaluating. Am I getting this? Am I getting this instead of waiting until you give them a test and then figure out whether they’ve got it or not.

Teachers and administrators both agreed that the new teacher evaluation is beneficial for student success. Teachers recognize the value of communicating the goals and having students track their progress on the learning goals.

**Information from the state is inconsistent.** Since the adoption of the Common Core State Standards in Florida the state has decided continuously make changes which have left
many teachers confused. Initially the state decided to fully implement the Common Core Standards as they were written. The state then decided to change the name of the standards, removing the word “common” and replacing it with “Florida” however, this will not be the case for every subject area. Reports trickle down in the media, at times on a weekly basis with changes pertaining to the direction of the Common Core.

Teachers unilaterally felt that the information from the state pertaining to the Common Core new standards is inconsistent. The new standards appeared to be an afterthought because no one was certain to what the state’s stance was. One thing they were aware of was the consistent changes and updates from the state about the Common Core. The state has halted moving forward with the new standards to decide if the state will adopt them and what the standards will look like. It appeared teachers almost accepted this as commonplace within the state. The district seemed to take a “wait and see” approach, not really moving forward with fidelity until the state decides. In the case of language arts standards, the Florida Standards changed from Common Core to Language Arts Florida Standards (LAFS) which appears to be a copy and paste of the Common Core. As one teacher pointed out, “They don’t know the direction yet because the state has changed things. We have Common Core, we have LAFS which looks like a cut and paste, a copy cut and paste of what Common Core was.” Teachers and administrators discussed the inconsistencies and delays from the state create an environment where no one understands what they next move is. Teachers especially expressed confusion and uncertainty to what their lessons would look like the following school year. One teacher said, “We don’t know if we’re doing Common Core here in the state.” Another teacher expressed,
“The State of Florida can’t really decide what they were doing.”

Teachers responded to Florida’s decision to pull out of the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Career (PARCC) testing to be replaced by an unknown state test. The principal expressed teachers concern over the unknown assessment asking, “What is the test going to be? Please tell me what it’s going to be? Please tell me before August 5th what it’s going to be?” Teachers expressed the most frustration because they are directly impacted by these changes within the state. As one teacher pointed out that it is difficult to prepare when teachers are not provided with any information,

You can go on to DOE and see the new release of whatever, you know, was out there and LAFS one last week was we’re not using PARCC. We’re going to something else but they didn’t name it. They said it's similar to something else. Now, as a teacher, I'm like, let me investigate this. I'm trying to prepare myself and my students for next year and think about where we’re going but I don’t know.

Examining the change in standards one teacher expressed concerns about not knowing what was happening, “Whatever the changes are, I wish they would've told earlier because it's instead of being proactive, I feel unreactive now. But if they're not releasing that, then I'm at a loss.” The same teacher further explained how she feels the district is doing the best they can despite the contradictions coming from the state, “I think the district is doing the best they can with the limited information they have. I think their hands are tied, too.” Overall teachers expressed that they believe the district and the school is doing the best with the limited information coming from the state.
One assistant principal acknowledged that these delays creates a waiting game for the district which has held up the district in terms of textbook adoption and preparing teachers for the new state tests. Initially the district decided to move forward with textbook adoption however, the books chosen were tied to the Common Core only and Florida had not decided if they were moving forward. As the assistant principal explained,

I think the district is doing the best they can with the limited information they have. I mean, they're trying to looking at textbook adoptions and Common Core Standards or whatever the standards will be, like trying to work in that direction but I think their hands are tied, too.

The administrative team addressed the inconsistencies from the state and pointed to the political debate nationally towards the Common Core State Standards, “It's a lot of political games. The popular thing was no Common Core, no Common Core. So they said, "All right, it's no Common Core." The assistant principals expressed feeling like this was just a political move on the part of our state instead of a sincere effort to improve education in Florida.

Teachers and administrators both recognized that the state is sending mixed messages regarding the new standards. The waiting game has resulted in teachers being frustrated about not knowing what the state test will look like. Teachers and administrators question the motive behind the sudden changes from the state regarding Common Core and feel it is part of a larger political move.

**Trainings are erratic.** Florida has begun to back away from the Common Core
State Standards and as a result, there have been minimal trainings. The district has adopted a wait and see attitude because they are uncertain of the direction. Teachers and administration discussed that the few trainings they have been to are not consistent or beneficial to fully understanding the new standards and how to successfully implement them within their classroom. One teacher explained, “That training was not as effective for me.” Other teachers stated they just do not know what is happening as one teacher commented, “I really don’t know what’s happening with training for the Common Core or the new books. We’ve just been kind of trying to add it as they go.” Teachers that did attend some of the initial trainings stated that the district-level trainings were not as comprehensive or practical than the teacher led trainings. As one teacher expressed that the quality of trainings vary, “some of them were better than others, some of them were very helpful, some of them were a waste of time, honestly.”

Assistant principals also commented on the nominal training for the new standards. One expressed, “There were some training specifically for Social Studies teachers. Where they were showing this is the type of activity you should be using to meet the standard. But it's been very minimal.” The assistant principal further elaborated on the training stating, “And then they'd show you like a writing prompt or sample activity. And they'd make you play nice and work through it. But there was no real training, I mean they'd show you one standard and give you an idea, but that was it.”

One teacher and instructional leader did state that she was part of an instructional plan focusing on Common Core. Describing the training she stated,

This summer, I was part of the 8th grade instructional plan. We incorporated Common
Core throughout that, and Common Core activities, and aligning that to Common Core.

Then, of course through our PLCs, we’re always having additional training, you know, bringing in those Common Core standards. For social studies, the common core is in addition to our regular standards.

Participants discussed the lack of training from the state on the new standards. Teachers and administrators recognize that much of this stems from the state halting implementation of the Common Core. The administrative team overall did not express the same level of concern about the changes to the standards partially because it does not directly impact them. Trainings that participants did attend at the district were perceived as ineffective.

The state is widely criticized for implementation process of both federal mandates. The participants reserved their harshest criticism to the state of Florida. Teachers indicated that the state is failing in terms of their education policies. One teacher expressed frustration over the mixed messaged from the state. She stated, “I think they need to be consistent with their message.” Another teacher remarked, “I give the state an F. If the state were under the same evaluation process as we are they would be on probation.” Teachers feel that the state makes decisions with little regard to how it will impact districts, schools and teachers. One teacher expressed her feelings about the state’s reform efforts and lack of planning indicating, “I was always feel like state goes, "Okay here we're doing this, and the rest of you the districts, the teachers you guys figure it out.”

Participants commented that the decision-makers at the top do not understand the reality of education and do not possess any real experience in a classroom. One administrator expressed
that the decisions-makers at the top level lack educational experience while another questioned what the reform efforts mean at the district level. She commented, “There's huge disconnect because it's being passed by people who aren't where it's being implemented. Does it really mean anything? Is it just ticking off the box that the federal government requires?” Another assistant principal commented, “Really the State of Florida couldn't really decide what they were doing.” While another assistant principal pointed out,

You have people from 50 states deciding what Florida needs to do, in addition to all the 50 states. And it's mostly people that have no education experience. So the disconnect is there naturally. They don't know what it's like to be in a school, they don't know what's happening in the schools. But they're deciding what's going to happen in the schools. One common thread from participants concerning the Common Core Standards is that they feel they are being used by the state as political leverage. One assistant principal was angered at the state’s response to the new standards and feels educators are being used to drive a political motive. Another assistant principal elaborated on this idea of being used as a “political pawn” to push an agenda stating. As she illustrated,

I feel that often we're being used as political pawns. And so are our children. And I resent that. The decisions are not being made by the educators; they're being made by the legislature, or the federal government. And I think everybody feels they're somewhat an expert, because everyone went to school at one time. So they feel they know it. And I think there's a big disconnect there.
The administrative team acknowledged that Florida seems to jump on the bandwagon instead of addressing the needs and concerns of students. As one administrator stated, “And to a lot of people it’s going to seem like the flavor of the month. We’re doing Common Core, Florida Core right now, what’s coming next?” Another assistant principal commented on the changes Florida has made in removing the word “common” from the language arts standards a strictly political move, “They took away Common, and they put Florida. That was a political move.” The principal acknowledged that the district is doing a “fair job” with implementing the two new reform efforts. The principal also recognized part of the issue stems from the channels that the initiatives go through before schools implement them and more important, who is part of the initiatives. As she pointed out,

I think overall the intent of what someone wanted to be done federally by the time it rolls down here to this level, it has gone through so many change that it’s either tightened up so tight or we’re so far away from the intent of it…. because sometimes both good and bad people are so number-driven.

The district is in limbo waiting to see what the state has decided about the Common Core standards and the tests that will be used to test students on the new standards placing the responsibility at the state level. Teachers expressed concern not as the principal stated, “I’m sure the county, they understand clearly to the top how the game has to be played. As soon as they get information, it will be rolled out. It will be rolled out.” Discussing the ongoing changes within the state the principal specified.
You just have to wait until the new administration comes. Who takes over at the White House and who does he pick for education? Then you have to look at who’s the new governor in town. What is his platform? Yeah. It changes. Everybody wants their own name, their own title.

The adoption of the Common Core State Standards has left educators feeling uncertain about the future. Teachers are frustrated that there have been so many changes regarding the new standards and are left waiting. Teachers overall feel that the state has done a poor job executing the changes of the new standards. Teachers and administrators expressed that they feel the reform efforts from the state are a result of politics. There is a belief that change is a result of a political platform instead of the well-being of students within the state of Florida.

**Summary of Findings**

The mandate most frequently and commonly referenced when educators were asked about federal and state policy was No Child Left Behind. Participants discussed feeling that they were losing control as a result of how the state implemented the requirements of No Child Left Behind. Requirements from the state impacted certification, while the district required a uniformed common board. In addition, mandatory retention for third graders and certificate of attendance caused additional pressure from the high-stakes FCAT test. And the renewed focus on reading required districts to hire and train reading teachers, but also required schools to place an emphasis on reading over other subjects. Teachers in particular felt the direct impact of these policies and are often left feeling frustrated, confused and used by the state as a political pawn.
In response to the district’s implementation of the Marzano Causal evaluation administrators commented on the fact that it is time-consuming and that teachers are losing instruction time to work on aspects of the evaluation which did in turn impact student success. Teachers and administrators both commented on the subjectivity of the evaluation and the lack of consistency between schools and administrators. Participants acknowledged the gaps that existed in training whereas administration has benefited from an outside vendor. New teachers stated that they were not adequately trained. Teachers expressed the benefits of teacher trainings as offering practical information as opposed to district staff training which participants perceived as that is irrelevant. The Marzano Causal evaluation is considered a good resource for teachers and training, but not meant for evaluation purposes. Overall educators are able to see past the adverse effects of the new evaluation tool and determine that students will ultimately benefit from teachers incorporating the Marzano indicators in the classroom.

The new standards highlight the state’s inconsistencies in communicating with educators. Teachers are bombarded with mixed messages from the state which include a change in the high-stakes testing to a yet undetermined test and the removal of the word “common” from the adopted standards. Teachers feel they have not received adequate information from the state and it is influencing how they are preparing for the upcoming school year. Many teachers, in particular, were uncertain if the state was implementing Common Core while others understood the standards did not change; only the name did.

In sum, teachers and administrators at Southview Middle School feel that in its effort to implement reform, has failed to do so with fidelity. The participants sympathized with the
district and understood that they are working with the information communicated from the state. Overall the teachers were complementary to the administrative staff and felt they were doing the best job they could consider the lack of communication from the state. Educators feel the impact of rapid reform is both positive and deleterious. The policies in place are viewed as beneficial for students overall success but they are poorly implemented at the state level, leaving districts and schools to work with the gaps of information and resources from the state-level.

**Chapter V: Discussion of Research Findings**

**Revisiting the Problem of Practice**

During the past decade schools have been confronted with a changing sea of policy expectations and policy demands, most of them under the guise of concern for improving educational quality (Ballet and Kelcherman, 2008). The publication of *A Nation at Risk* (1983) sparked a new measure focusing on school reform and with it a renewed concentration on educational accountability at the federal, state, and local levels (Hansen, 1993). Fullan (1993) points out that individual schools are expected to engage in an unremitting renewal process brought on through large scale reform efforts passed on to districts from states by way of the federal government.

*A Nation at Risk* (1983) ignited a national debate in the United States regarding our public school system. There was a belief that public schools were not preparing students to compete in a global market. As a result, states began to adopt mandates that impacted everything from curriculum standards to educator evaluation. Unfortunately, education reform over the last two decades has been grounded in a market-based approach pressing for a uniform system
guided by federal and state authority (Apple, 2001). School districts and individual schools no longer operated autonomously as the federal government began pressing for more and more control.

In 2010 the Florida State Board of Education approved, not unlike many other states, the adoption of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for English/Language Arts and Mathematics (Florida Department of Education). The new Common Core State Standards were to replace Florida’s Sunshine State Standards which fell under the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. One year later the Governor of Florida signed Senate Bill 736 into legislation which changed the evaluation process for Florida’s instructional and school-based administrative personnel. Senate Bill 736 allowed districts to change their evaluation activities with many districts choosing to implement the Marzano Causal evaluation method to assess teachers.

Educational reform in Florida has influenced how educators view their practice. Many argue that the Common Core State Standards requires educators to abandon the traditional approach to instruction (Smith, Wilhelm and Fredrickson 2013). Groth & Bennett-Schmidt (2013) state that teachers are expected to deconstruct these new standards and investigate the vertical articulation of curriculum. However, the state continues to send mixed-messages regarding the progress of these change efforts. As Ehrenhalt (2013) wrote, “Florida had made some changes to its annual performance exam in the past year, mostly in the writing category, and the results weren’t pretty. If the numbers had been taken at face value, more than 130 schools would have received a failing grade. Nine of those schools would have dropped all the way from A to F.”
The district in which I work chose to implement the Marzano Causal evaluation system which requires teachers to execute a process that is perceived as cumbersome and potentially damaging (Samples, 2012). The initial rollout for the evaluation began slowly the first year allowing teachers and administrators to adjust to the changes. The following year the district decided to implement all of the 60 indicators within the Marzano scale. The new evaluation requires frequent, time-consuming administrative walkthroughs. In addition, administrative staff is left to coach the instructional staff on the new evaluation process and conduct a series of conferences.

Reform efforts in Florida mirror reform efforts at the national level (O’Connor, 2013). Educators within the district have little say in regards to the educational reform initiatives that directly affect their profession. There is a belief that these reform models are implemented quickly and without fidelity. Compounding this issues is the perception of the new evaluation process as an untested, thoughtlessly conceived innovation.

Educators are often left out of the reform conversation and as a result there is not a clear understanding of how the change is affecting them. Donaldson (2013) suggests that little research exists pertaining to the effect of teacher evaluation reform on educators. As he states,

Despite growing momentum to reform teacher evaluation in order to increase its impact on teachers’ practice and persistence in the profession, very little research examines how current reforms influence teachers’ attitudes or reported instructional practices. Do the new evaluation systems lead to enhancements in teachers’ instruction overall? (Donaldson, 2012)
Educators are also feeling the impact of implementing the new Common Core State Standards compounded with the new teacher evaluation in an era of high stakes-testing. This research study set out to capture educational change that begins at the federal level and concludes at the school level. Two key mandates within the state of Florida, Common Core and new teacher evaluation, were utilized to analyze how educational change translates from the federal level through various channels (state, district and school). The research study utilized focus groups with teachers and administrative staff, in addition to a one-on-one interview with the principal to discuss how these mandates have impacted their profession.

**Discussion of Major Findings**

Through focus group and one-on-one interviews with teachers and administrators in a suburban middle school in Florida several themes emerged. Table 3 presents these central findings.

Table 3

*Major Findings Identified by Administrators and Teachers*

- Educators feel that they are no longer in control
- Pressure as a result of standardized testing
- Renewed focus on reading
- Gaps in training
- Educators deem this is what “good” educators already do (beneficial for training purposes)
- Teacher evaluations are time-consuming for administrators
- Teacher evaluations are inconsistent
Educators feel that they are no longer in control. Administrative and instructional staff commented on not being in control of their profession through previous and current reform efforts. According to the participants, as a result of No Child Left Behind, the district began to exercise control over them. The district started requiring teachers to implement common boards in their classroom while some argued that their reading curriculum became scripted. Teachers now felt that they lost their autonomy in the classroom. Teachers also pointed to not being valued as a professional with making curricular decisions for their students. The state also focused its efforts on recruiting and obtaining “highly qualified” teachers, and as a result, many were now forced to add to or change their certification.

Teachers also expressed a lack of control due to the most current reform efforts. Many stated that the new teacher evaluation system requires the implementation of the sixty Marzano indicators and that this requires a change to their daily practice. The indicators are part of their evaluation and teachers expressed that they are time-consuming to complete. Teachers are now expected to implement a scale to informally assess students’ understanding towards learning goals. Students are required to rate their understanding and discuss their level of comprehension towards the learning goals. Teachers are evaluated on a number of indicators that include, but are not limited to, their use of technology, level of enthusiasm, and celebrating student success. In addition, teachers stated that administrative staff can walk in at any time and evaluate their performance without notice. As a result, teachers discussed that they sometimes felt scrutinized because a brief walk-through only captures a moment of time within the lesson. Teachers felt
they risked being evaluated on something they did not have control over. Teachers felt with the previous evaluation they had more jurisdiction over the evaluation process.

**Pressure as a result of standardized testing.** Administrators and teachers remarked that federal and state mandates targeting standardized testing created a highly pressured teaching environment. Teachers and administrators discussed how they were suddenly faced with the possibility of students being retained or not graduating high school as a result of low scores on the state test. Teachers felt they were suddenly under a microscope and their professional judgment could be questioned based on students’ test scores. Also teachers expressed that they felt they disappointed a student if the student did not pass the state exam. Under the No Child Left Behind Act of 2000 students would be deemed “proficient” in reading and math scores based on standardized tests by 2014. The federal government allowed states to determine the proficiency test and Florida created their own high-stakes test. Participants agreed that standardized tests created an awareness of where students were academically and placed an emphasis on student test scores. Dialogue from participants also pointed to a sudden awareness of student scores and school letter grades that they feel was not as prevalent prior to No Child Left Behind. Teachers discussed the policy of holding third grade students back that did not pass the state test. Third grade teachers would execute the curriculum and have to wait until the summer to determine which students passed the state test adding to the tension. In addition, high school students unable to pass the state test were given a certificate of completion instead of a high school diploma. Teachers were suddenly faced with the realization that students might be retained or fail to graduate based on their instructional practices within the class.
Renewed focus on reading. Administrative staff and teachers commented that the state’s focus on reading created wide-scale change which impacted many educators and students. Students that scored below proficiency were suddenly required to take additional reading classes. As a result, changes were made to the school day, bell schedules and student schedules. Teachers expressed feeling inundated with reading, leaving other content areas behind.

The topic of reading surfaced in every focus group and interview and the dialogue illustrated both positive and adverse implications. No Child Left Behind focused heavily on math and reading assessing students every year on these skills from grades 3-10. Students that scored below a level 3 on the state test were considered less proficient and required to take additional reading classes. Students that scored below a level 3 in math were scheduled to take an intensive math class. However, students in reading would take their reading class in addition to their English core class. Schools compensated by adding reading classes and placing students that scored a level one or two on the state test (FCAT) reading into single or double-blocked reading classes. A double-block of reading meant that a student would be in a reading class for two class periods. In these cases students were in their content area language arts class for a period in addition to a double-blocked reading class. Teachers expressed that this overwhelmed the students that struggled with reading. As a result of state (FCAT) scores, there was a need for the district to hire reading teachers and coaches to meet with the increased enrollment of the reading classes.

Participants reported that students’ schedules were modified and that because of these changes many students were unable to take an elective because of the added reading class.
Something as innocuous as requiring additional support in reading led to wide-scale changes within schools. Suddenly students did not have the opportunity to take a physical education class, art or band class because the first classes cut for these students were their electives. Teachers that did not teach reading or a core subject felt their curriculum was pushed aside to allot more time to focus on reading. Furthermore, schools were faced with adding single and double blocks of reading to an already existing school schedule. In response, many schools were forced to add an additional class into the bell schedule. To accommodate the extra class, participants commented that schools within the state of Florida often cut the amount of time in each class. Teachers were now covering the same lessons with less time. Teachers expressed that students have been besieged with reading so much that they lack skills found in other subject areas.

**Gaps in training.** Participants expressed concern over the gaps in training for the new teacher evaluation system. Teachers, in particular, pointed out that the district trainings are inconsistent, the trainers within the county are not effective and the professional development offered does not deepen their knowledge of Marzano. In addition, new teachers felt they were not adequately trained within the district on the new Marzano indicators.

The district’s training for teachers is perceived as weak and does not offer real-world skills that can be applied to the classroom. Teachers pointed out that the district professional development opportunities are taught by staff that have not been in the classroom implementing the mandated change. The concern is that the district trainers are centrally located in the county and have been removed from the classroom for a while and therefore felt they were unable to
offer valuable training. Teachers stated the trainings that they attended which were led by current teachers to be most practical. The district hired an outside consultant for middle schools to train administrators on the new evaluation which was acknowledged by administrators as effective. The consultant conducted walkthroughs with administrators and spent time discussing their observations. Furthermore, new teachers and returning teachers expressed that they are not adequately trained by the district on the new evaluation system and are often referred to the Marzano-based online tutorials in iObservation.

**Educators deem this is what “good” educators already do (beneficial for training purposes).** Administrators and teachers acknowledged that the new teacher evaluation system provides a framework for effective teaching. Teachers, in particular, stated that the Marzano framework is beneficial for new teachers. Veteran teachers expressed the need for the Marzano framework and stated that they wished they had the strategies when they were a new teacher. Teachers indicated that they are continually referring to the framework when they are planning their lessons.

The sixty Marzano indicators cover numerous aspects of teaching from monitoring students to collegiality amongst peers. Teachers stated the Marzano Causal indicators causes an awareness of their students’ progress and has positively impacted their teaching. Some teachers use the framework in planning lessons while others keep it next to their instructional plan and refer back to it. Teachers are required to gauge students’ level of understanding through informal assessments and scales. The process is continuous and teachers are required to reflect on their practice as well as the success of their students. Administration is expected to provide ongoing
feedback and support that establishes communication with teachers. Administrative feedback is collaborative and affords a dialogue built on feedback to improve practice. The new evaluation is perceived as a useful tool for beginning or returning teachers.

**Time-consuming.** Administrators and teachers communicated the new teacher evaluation is a time-consuming and arduous process to undertake throughout the school-year. Administrators, in particular, pointed to the amount of time taken from their day to conduct a teacher evaluation. Administrators discussed the pre and post conferences, inputting the evaluation into iObservation which is the online tool used for the evaluations. Teachers also suggested that the implementation of the requirements within is time-consuming and takes teachers away from their instructional time.

Assistant principals, specifically, discussed the amount of time it takes to successfully implement the new evaluation process with fidelity. The new evaluation requires administrative staff to conduct frequent classroom walkthrough evaluations to target all of the indicators within the instrument. The process necessitates that administration adheres to a tight schedule. Administrative staff conducts pre and post conferences with every teacher, each one taking approximately one hour. In addition, the school expects a specific number of walkthroughs throughout the year that covers the lengthy evaluation. The online evaluation tool, iObservation, used by administration is extensive and time-consuming, taking a few hours to input the feedback from the evaluations. Since the district’s implementation of the new evaluation tool administrators are still required to carry out the daily administrative duties in addition to the teacher evaluations.
**Inconsistency amongst schools and administrators.** Administrators and teachers remarked on the inconsistencies within the new evaluation system. Teachers, in particular, stated that evaluations vary amongst schools and administrators. Teachers indicated that it is well-known districtwide that some schools are lenient with their evaluations. Teachers feel there is a lack of fairness within the evaluation process and feel it is subjective.

Teachers stated that administrative walkthroughs are often not consistent within the district or even within individual schools. Assistant principals noted that there is an attempt within some schools to focus on inter-rater reliability however, not all schools take the time to do this and teachers do not feel this is fair. The district currently has an influx of teachers rated highly effective that does not match with student or school test scores. As a result, the district advised administrators to be mindful in their evaluations of teachers and not give out as many highly effective scores.

Teachers also expressed that there are inconsistencies amongst the amount of administrative walkthroughs depending on the school or administrator. Teachers conveyed that in some schools within the district the administrative walkthroughs are less frequent and there was a sense that some administrators were more lenient. Another issue that participants discussed is the new evaluation only addresses teachers but does not address instructional coaches or administrative staff. Support facilitation teachers are not provided with consistent guidelines to their evaluation and each administrator requests something different from them during the evaluation. Teachers ultimately felt that it is difficult for them to be evaluated on the
Marzano indicators when the administrator evaluating them was never evaluated using the same instrument.

**Information from the state is inconsistent.** Administrators and teachers expressed uncertainty over the future of the Common Core State Standards in Florida. Teachers discussed feelings of frustration due to state delaying implementation of the new standards. Teachers commented on not knowing what the new state test looks like and being unprepared for the start of the school year. Teachers were unable to discuss the new standards in detail or comment on trainings within the district because the state was not providing any direction and the implementation date from the state was ambiguous. As such, the district has not moved forward in implementing substantial training for teachers or administrators.

During the focus group and interviews the state repeatedly released updates about the progress of the Common Core in Florida. These relentless changes caused for confusion amongst many of the participants as to where Florida stood with Common Core. Initially Florida changed the English Language Arts standards and replaced them with Language Arts Florida Standards (LAFS). In addition, Florida decided to change the name of the standards removing the word “core” and replacing it with “Florida” calling the new standards Florida Core Standards. Some of the participants were unsure if Florida decided to change the standards, while others expressed that they were advised that their subject areas were keeping the name “Common Core”. The district halted textbook adoption as a result of waiting to find out what the new standards would be. Florida opted out of using Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Career (PARCC) assessment as the new state test after initially considering the test.
The state had yet to communicate which test would be used to assess students. As a result teachers expressed concern as to what their curriculum would look like for the following year and not knowing what the state test would look like.

**Discussion of Findings in Relation to the Theoretical Framework**

The Burke-Litwin theory of organizational change was employed to inform this research study. The theory provided a lens to study the influence of federal change within a school system.

**Organizational performance and change.** The Causal Model of Organizational Performance and Change (the Burke-Litwin Model) delivers a method of analysis on the power of mandated change within a school (Burke-Litwin, 1992). In this study, as outlined in Chapter II, the Burke-Litwin framework acknowledges that with organizational change the “number of variables changing at the same time, the magnitude of environmental change, and frequent resistance of human systems create a whole confluence of processes that are extremely difficult to predict and almost impossible to control” (Burke-Litwin, 1992, p.523). Furthermore, Burke-Litwin established two distinct sets of organizational dynamics one associated with transactional human behavior—everyday interactions and exchanges that impact climate.

According to Burke-Litwin the external environmental box represents the output while the individual and performance box the output (Burke-Litwin, 1992). The Burke-Litwin model (see Figure XX) is illustrated with the key factors featured at the top tier of the chart. The lower tiers become slowly less important.
The Burke-Litwin model contends that all of the factors are cohesive to some degree. Changes in one of the components will eventually affect all of the other factors. The twelve components, definitions and examples of how organizational change occurred at Southview Middle are illustrated below.

**External environment.** The external environment represents any outside condition or situation that influences the organization which include markets, competition, other organizations, political situations and the economy. At Southview Middle School the external environment dynamic was the consistent barrage of reform efforts coming from the federal government. This led to districts and schools executing reform efforts that were led by an outside source (state and/or federal government) as opposed to allowing districts and schools to operate independently. In the case of the Common Core State Standards districts halted moving forward with implementation to wait for the decision from the federal government which created
a gap of knowledge from participants. The decision by the state to adhere to the federal
government’s guidelines in order to obtain Race to the Top funds allowed the district to adopt the
new teacher evaluation.

**Mission and strategy.** The Mission and strategy is what top management believes is the
organization’s mission and strategy. What the employees within the organization believe is the
central purpose of the organization. Organizations often utilize mission statements and employ a
strategy which is how the organization plans to accomplish their mission over time. The state of
Florida has a clear mission statement which reads “Increase the proficiency of all students within
one seamless, efficient system, by providing them with the opportunity to expand their
knowledge and skills through learning opportunities and research valued by students, parents,
and communities, and to maintain an accountability system that measures student progress
toward the following goals: highest student achievement, seamless articulation and maximum
access, skilled workforce and economic development and quality efficient services.” Educators
are somewhat disengaged to the mission statement due to the eternal factors driving the change
outside of the department of education. Political, federal and national forces are leading
educational change therefore it is easy for a state’s mission statement to be compromised. The
mission statement is concise however, the strategy used to execute that mission is confounded.

**Leadership.** Leadership refers to the executives providing the organization with an
overall direction and serving as behavioral role models for all employees. The principal of
Southview Middle held administrative staff and teachers to a higher standard in terms of the
evaluation process. There is an understanding amongst staff that the leadership within the school
has high expectations of both students and teachers resulting in additional work not found at other schools within the district. Unlike other schools within the district, the principal expected administrative staff to conduct frequent walkthroughs and communicate with staff on progress and expectations. Teachers are also required to reflect on their instructional practice and students understanding of the learning goals weekly in their lesson plans, a practice other schools do not require. Participants expressed inconsistencies within other schools within the district pertaining to final evaluations which they feel is a result of a principal lowering their expectations.

**Culture.** Culture is defined as the “way we do things around here”. Culture is a collection of both overt and covert rules, values and principles that are enduring and guide organizational behavior. Southview Middle is a high performing school in a semi-affluent area within Central Florida. There is an understanding that the district and school culture creates results that are expected to outperform the state’s test scores. Participants commented on the district, and the school, as “leading the way” in reform efforts to stay ahead of other districts.

**Structure.** Structure refers to the arrangement of functions and people into specific areas and levels of responsibility, decision-making authority, communication, and relationships to assure effective implementation of the organization’s mission and strategies. At Southview Middle School administrative personnel is responsible for disseminating information from the state. Administrative staff obtained their information from the district whereas the district relies on the state for communication about educational changes within the state. As a result of educational reform in Florida, there is a top-down approach to decision-making which does not entrust individuals to take an authoritative approach. Educators are not deciding on the reform
that affect their daily practice; instead it is in the hands of politicians and governing bodies which they feel are far removed from education.

**Management Practices.** Management Practices refers to what managers do in the normal course of events to utilize the human and material resources at their disposal to carry out the organization’s strategy. The principal requires a specific number of administrative walkthroughs to ensure that the team hits all sixty of the Marzano indictors. Oftentimes at other schools teachers may have only their final evaluation and the administrator is trying to evaluate a teacher on all of the indicators on that one day. The principal also requires weekly lesson plans that provide feedback on the lesson, percentage of students showing an understanding of the learning goals which administration comments on. This process allows administrators to have a sense of how that teacher operates and if something needs to be addressed it provides an opportunity to discuss before the final evaluation.

**Systems.** Systems refer to the standardized policies and mechanisms that facilitate work, primarily manifested in the organization’s reward systems, management information systems (MIS), and in such control systems as performance appraisal, goal and budget development, and human resource allocation. The district utilized the Marzano Causal evaluation system for performance appraisal and to help teachers establish goals. Teachers are required to target an indicator to focus on during their formal evaluation and to indicate growth in that area. Participants established the benefits of the evaluation for training purposes but did not feel this system is an effective means of teacher evaluation. The state also initially decided to change the
standard to better prepare for college and career. The state test attached to the standards creates the reward system by rating students, schools and districts based on their performance on a test.

**Climate.** Climate signifies the collective current impressions, expectations, and feelings that members of local work units have that, in turn, affect their relations with their boss, with one another, and with other units. It is documented within the focus group sessions that participants at Southview Middle School are dissatisfied with the state in terms of current educational initiatives. Dialogue included feeling like a “political pawn” and concern that decisions made within the federal government are done for political reasons instead of the welfare of students. There is a belief that the district and administration within the school are operating in an effective manner given the current climate of reform within the state.

**Task requirements/individual skills.** Task requirements/individual skills and abilities refers to the required behavior for task effectiveness, including specific skills and knowledge required of people to accomplish the work for which they were assigned and for which they feel they are directly responsible. It is recognized in the focus group the need for teachers and administrative staff to be effectively trained on the evaluation and new standards. Participants expressed never feeling fully prepared when new reform efforts are implemented.

**Individual needs and values.** Individual needs and values denote specific psychological factors that provide desire and worth for individual actions or thoughts. The focus group documented educators belief that they are not valued from the state. The teacher evaluation denotes a teachers’ worthiness in the eyes of administrative personnel that have not been fully trained by the district. Administrators expressed gaps in training and questions unanswered by
the state-approved training sessions. The recent release of value-added model (VAM) scores has added to the feeling from teachers that their profession is not valued by the state.

**Motivation.** Motivation is defined as the aroused behavior tendencies to move towards goals, take needed action, and persist until satisfaction is attained. Teachers struggled to see value in some of their practices tied to their evaluation. Teachers and administrators expressed that despite their frustrations which are shown within the research, there is a core understanding that students and teachers would benefit from the skills used within the evaluation and new standards.

**Individual and organizational performance.** Individual and organizational performance pertains to the outcome or result as well as the indicator or effort and achievement (e.g. productivity, customer satisfaction, profit and quality). Southview Middle School and the district it serves is an outcome-oriented organization. State test scores are recognized and schools often tout their school’s performance. Student achievement is paramount and participants explained that it is important to outperform other schools and districts within the state. Test scores are equated to job performance and job security. Recent changes in Florida has tied student test scores to teacher evaluations. The district is held in high esteem and families move to be in the district. Southview’s test scores remain high therefore it is hard to determine the affect the new evaluation has had on student success.

**Summary.** The Burke-Litwin model produced a method of analysis on the influence of mandated federal policy in a school. The external environment being the reform efforts performed a vital role in the changes that Southview experienced. According to Burke-Litwin
(1992) any changes in one of the components will eventually affect all of the other factors. The reform efforts in the state of Florida contributed significantly to the climate of the school. Teachers and administrative staff acknowledged that their roles in the school changed as a result of the reform efforts within the state. The impact of a new evaluation combined with new state standards created an environment where teachers evaluated their needs and value as educators. In addition, the educational change in Florida required administration to alter their managerial practices dramatically to adhere to new statewide and district mandates.

Discussion of Findings in Relation to the Literature Review

The findings within this research study are powerfully related to the literature review presented in Chapter II. The literature review centered around six main concepts to inform this study:

1. Federal Policies for educational reform: A Nation at Risk to Race to the Top.
2. Influence of reform efforts on public education.
3. Teacher evaluations in the wake of reform.
5. Common Core State Standards
6. Educators’ Perceptions of the Common Core State Standards

The relationship between the literature review and research findings are presented below.

Federal policies for educational reform: A Nation at Risk to Race to the Top.

The current state of educational reform began with the publication of A Nation at Risk. A Nation at Risk (1983) described secondary school curricular as standardized, watered down to
the point that it no longer serves a purpose for students. A Nation at Risk (1983) stressed that the United States was falling behind other countries in subjects such as math and reading. As a result there was a crisis within education. There was a realization that American students would not be able to compete in a global economy as a result of the poor education system. As such, an era of reform targeting standards and accountability began. Spillane advises that much of the reform rhetoric embedded with the standards and testing movement is the notion that all with greater accountability in schools, students will be able to achieve the American dream of mobility.

President Bush’s 1989 educational summit gained momentum around national goals proposed as a framework to permit states to develop their own educational standards, keeping governance at the state level (Tirozzi & Uro, 1997). The standards-based movement in education that began with A Nation at Risk “went national” with the passage of the Improving America's Schools Act of 1994 (Jorgensen & Hoffman, 2003). The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 expected states, school districts, and schools to ensure all students are proficient in grade-level math and reading by 2014 (New America, 2013). States were left to define grade-level performance. Standards based reform before NCLB (2001) occurred at the state level rather than the national level offering states guidance as opposed to a set of directives (Desimone, 2013).

In Florida standards based reform shaped districts and schools. The state adopted the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) to assess students on the Florida Sunshine State Standards. Schools and districts were now rated based on their performance on the state test. The era of accountability also created a level of transparency that did not seem to exist
before. The state placed the guidelines of having students “proficient” in reading and math by 2014 but loosely defined proficiency. Participants acknowledged that Florida is nowhere near the goals that were set forth with No Child Left Behind. No Child Left Behind Act guaranteed goals that were are viewed as unrealistic and something no educational system anywhere on earth has ever accomplished (Wallis, 2008).

**Influence of reform efforts on public education.** What influence has reform efforts had on public education? The literature review documented the force at which the No Child Left Behind Act had on American public schools. The participants noted No Child Left Behind as the key reform movement that influenced their profession. Spillane points out that “despite two decades of dramatic shifts in educational reform and policy among states and local school districts pre– and post–No Child Left Behind, we see that the more things have changed, the more things seem to have stayed the same.”

There is a belief that No Child Left Behind required a curriculum that was too limited and narrow and does not allow educators to be creative with their lesson plans (DarlingHammond, 2010; McCarthey, 2008; Smith and Kovacs, 2011). Teachers pointed out that the standards and accountability movement took the creativity out of their lessons. Southview teachers discussed the scripted reading curriculum and the tight schedule they needed to adhere to in order to get through their lessons.

Danielson states, “The push for teacher quality has developed from the modern school reform movement” (Danielson, 2001, p.2). Combined with the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 states were suddenly required to train, recruit and evaluate highly qualified teachers
Educators are frequently attending professional development classes and adding on areas of certification to remain “highly qualified” within the state. The state keeps shifting the rules towards certification and educators are having difficulty keeping up with the changes.

**Teacher evaluations in the wake of reform.** How has the process of teacher evaluation changed in the wake of reform? Race to the Top challenged states to reform the way they are evaluating teachers. Weiss and Payzant remarked that for states to win Race to the Top grants, they must promise to raise academic standards and develop new ways to evaluate students’ progress toward these standards. The result is a highly charged climate of data driven accountability combined with teacher effectiveness (Froese-Germain, 2011).

Under Race to the Top Florida mandated that districts change how they were evaluating teachers. Southview Middle School’s district opted for the Marzano Causal teacher evaluation an evaluative tool many districts adopted. Marzano’s Causal Teacher Evaluation Model is a framework that focuses on the measure of teacher effectiveness as well as the identification of professional development needed for improvement (Marzano, 2012). The Marzano Causal evaluative framework measures teacher effectiveness by assessing current teacher performance levels according to specific criteria such as providing clear student learning objectives, evaluating and tracking progress, establishing an environment conducive to learning, and rewarding student achievement and success.

The district, during the first year of implementation, gradually implemented the evaluation. The following year teachers were evaluated on all sixty indicators. In addition,
Florida implemented the new value-added model (VAM) which ties student test scores to teacher evaluations. Recently the state of Florida publically released teachers’ VAM scores. Value added-model scores assume that student learning is measured well by a given test, is influenced by the teacher alone, and is independent from the growth of classmates and other aspects of the classroom context. None of these assumptions is well supported by current evidence (Darling-Hammond, Amrein-Beardsley, Haertel, & Rothstein, 2012).

Baeder discussed that Marzano specified that teachers can markedly improve student learning with just one or two strategies, as Marzano's "causal" language implies. It would suggest that educators should be able to see a dramatic rise in test scores through implementation of several strategies however; there is no rationale to this. The district has seen a surge of “highly effective teachers” that does not appear to match school grades. As the principal pointed out, there was a discrepancy in the amount of teachers rated as “highly effective” and schools that were underperforming.

**Educators’ perceptions of new evaluation systems.** How do educators perceive the new evaluation system? Schmoker suggests the new teacher evaluation system suffers from “too much, too soon” syndrome and leaves essential gaps within its logic. Teachers expressed that the state and district implemented the new evaluation too soon without allowing teachers to adjust applying the instructional practices to their classroom. Teachers also pointed out that those who are evaluating have never been evaluated as a teacher under the new system. Rich (2012) explained in Chicago teachers under a new evaluation system expressed concerns that those who created the evaluations are unaware of what it is like to be in a classroom.
The literature suggested that the perceptions of educators over a new Race to the Top evaluation have changed over the last couple of years. In the beginning educators expressed feeling rushed and overwhelmed and undertrained by the evaluation. The frameworks were massive and contained chaotic, agenda-driven language. In addition, the evaluations were perceived as incongruously long; leaving teachers are anxiously trying to design lessons to meet the criteria (Anderson, 2012). District trainings for teachers on the new evaluation process are perceived as inefficient. Dialogue from participants pointed out that the trainings consisted of summarizing and regurgitating the book or using Power Point slides instead of offering practical skills that could be applied in the classroom. Teachers, expressed the new evaluation is lengthy and felt time would be better spent focusing on instruction.

Rosenberg & Silva examined a recent poll by education Sector of teachers and learned that the majority feel the new teacher evaluation process is improving. Participants expressed the training benefits of the new evaluation system for new and returning teachers. In addition teachers discussed the new evaluation process has made them more effective teachers. A recent survey of teachers suggest the rationale behind the increases in teacher confidence regarding the new evaluation points to revamped evaluator training and most importantly a system that stresses teacher improvement rather than judgment (Tennessee Consortium). Many teachers discussed the Marzano Causal evaluation as providing a framework for effective instructional practices.

Administrators expressed the level of commitment in conducting the evaluations
remains high. Schmoker pointed out that new evaluation process requires administrators to use these cumbersome instruments to conduct up to six observations per teacher per year and to conduct both pre-observation and post-observation conferences for each observation with every teacher. Administrators stressed that the new evaluative tool requires a high level of commitment in order to be precise and provide a quality evaluation that includes feedback for the teacher.

Common Core State Standards. How has the Common Core State Standards influenced education? Reform efforts over the past decade focused on standards and accountability. The Common Core State Standards, according to Kendall, was developed as set of shared national standards to ensure that students in every state are held to the same level of expectations that students in the world’s highest-performing countries are, and that they gain the knowledge and skills that will prepare them for success in postsecondary education and in the global arena. Reflecting back to A Nation at Risk the focus remains to prepare students for a global economy and ensure they are college and career-ready.

Florida initially adopted the new Common Core State Standards to be fully implemented during the 2014-2015 school year. Over the past year states have shifted their focus away from the Common Core State Standards with many abandoning or halting moving forward. Hendershott pointed out these concerns in New York City, K-12 public school principals sent a letter to New York Education Commissioner John King documenting their fears that they feel too many educators will use these high stakes tests to guide their curricula, rather than the more
meaningful Common Core Standards themselves. Some critics argued that the Common Core standards have been adopted without any field test and ultimately could not endorse them (Ravitch, 2013).

Over the past year Florida has ceased moving forward to the Common Core standards. Initially Florida indicated it was going to wait before fully moving forward with the Common Core. The literature pointed to a fear that teachers would not be ready to execute the new standards (Strauss, 2013). The state decided to abandon the PARCC test, followed by changing the name of the standards from Common Core to Florida Core. English Language Arts standards will be renamed Language Arts Florida Standards (LAFS). The literature pointed to a level of discontent pointing out that the promise of the Common Core is dying and teaching and learning are being distorted (Strauss, 2013).

**Educators’ perceptions of the Common Core State Standards.** What are educators’ perceptions of the Common Core State Standards? Due to the uncertainty from the state of Florida educators were unaware and often misinformed of the state’s efforts. Participants expressed a lack of direction and uncertainty from the state. The literature points to the speed it took to create the new standards. The development of the Common Core Standards was rapid, taking approximately one year to create while previous reform efforts targeting standards took approximately seven years (Main, 2012).

The district has waited on adopting new textbooks until the state can solidify a plan for the new standards. Educators have expressed concerns that state testing will begin before teachers can properly align the curriculum (Hart Research). As illustrated in the study,
participants are concerned that they are uncertain about the direction of the new standards and state test and feel they have not been afforded the time to work the new standards into the curriculum. Teachers convey that their present curricular materials and textbooks are not properly aligned to the new standards (EPE, 2012). Participants pointed out that training on the new standards has been nominal largely due to the erratic information coming from the state about the future of the standards. The literature that states although most teachers have received some professional development related to the Common Core State Standards, respondents have typically spent less than four days in such training” (EPE, 2012).

The state of Florida initially decided on the PARCC test to assess students on the new Common Core State Standards. Currently districts are focusing on unwrapping the new standards and mapping out the curriculum before full implementation begins with no understanding of what the state assessments will look like (Demski, 2013). Dialogue was consistent to the literature review as participants expressed concerns over all of the uncertainties described in relation to the new standards.

**Summary.** A Nation at Risk (1983) brought education reform to the forefront of a national conversation on the state of education. There was a belief that the education system in the United States was not preparing students to compete in a global economy. As a result a myriad of reform efforts were implemented, each hoping to solve a perceived crisis within the educational system. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 created a focus on standardized testing with the goal of moving every child to a proficient level in the areas of math and reading by 2014. Since then reform within education has focused on everything from standardized
testing, a set of national standards and teacher evaluation. Race to the Top provided states with an opportunity to obtain federal funds, as long as they adhered to specific criteria. As such, states began to move toward a national set of standards and revamp how teachers are evaluated. Teachers are feeling the pressure as a result of the intense focus on state testing. In addition many teachers are being evaluated on a new set of criteria while their evaluations linked to student performance.

**Conclusion**

The two research questions that guided this case study focused on the following: what are teachers’ perceptions of mandated organizational change that influence education, what are the positive and adverse outcomes of reform efforts in the state? The focus group sessions and one-on-one interview provided insight into the influence of reform efforts on educators.

Reviewing the case study finding, it was apparent that the No Child Left Behind Act had the most wide-scale influence on educators. Participants discussed few other prior reform initiatives such as Bush’s Reform 2000 however; No Child Left Behind dominated the conversation. Reform efforts prior to No Child Left Behind Act did not have a direct bearing on the classroom. Suddenly teachers were required to understand the state benchmarks and tie their lessons to the standards. Districts required teachers to display these standards on their board in a “common board configuration” that required uniformity in every school within the district. Everything centered on the benchmarks and the benchmarks were tied to state testing.

Teachers expressed this pressurized atmosphere as brought on by testing. Students were graded according to their performance on the FCAT and school grades were made public
increasing the burden on educators. Students that were considered less proficient on the state test were now required to take single or double blocks of reading. A statewide focus on reading took over schools and districts causing both positive and deleterious implications.

Students that were not proficient were placed in single and double-block reading programs. Many schools shortened class time to add another class period in order to accommodate the new reading classes. Students’ classes were altered and some lost electives. In many cases special education students were affected because many of those students lost physical education or band to accommodate a reading class. Mandatory retention for third grade students unable to pass the FCAT was another implication of the state testing. In addition, high school students could attend school yet still not graduate as a result of not passing the state test.

There was a belief that schools were failing students and as a result teachers were often targeted as the cause of these failures. As such, the conversation shifted to teacher evaluation in the wake of Race to the Top initiatives. States were required to revamp how teachers were evaluated. Florida left this decision to individual school districts and many decided on Marzano Causal evaluation. The original purpose of the Marzano Causal framework is for teachers to use it as a guide, not as an evaluation tool. Teachers understand the Marzano tool is an effective means to coach teachers but do not feel it is practical as an evaluative instrument. The new evaluation is time-consuming for both teachers and administrators. The implementation of the new evaluation was rapid and the district did not provide equal training to teachers and administrators. Middle schools had the advantage of an outside consultant that administrators utilized which exceeded district trainings. New teachers and returning teachers who were not in
the school system during the initial phase of implementation did not receive training.

Professional development conducted under a cohort model of teacher-trainers provided practical skills that teachers could apply to their classroom.

Teachers want to be trained by other teachers who understand the implications of the classroom.

Administrative staff evaluating teachers needs to have an understanding of what “highly effective” looks like for the county.

The new evaluation system does not provide a level of inter-rater reliability throughout the district. The increased amount of teachers determined to be “highly-effective” and the district advising administrative evaluators of this demonstrate that disconnect. A teacher’s effectiveness can change depending on the school and the evaluator. Teachers also want to be evaluated by administrators that are have been evaluated using the same instrument.

The state has not provided clarity as to where they stand in terms of the Common Core State Standards. The delay has affected educators who are trying to plan for the next school year. There was a disconnect in educators responses when discussing the Common Core State Standards because the information circulating from the state and district changed on a weekly basis. The name for the standards has changed but they look the same allowing educators to believe they are being used for political gains. Text book adoption was halted and the state decided not to utilize the PARCC test as the state evaluative tool. The uncertainty affected how teachers responded because no one knew what was happening and the information kept changing.

Teachers and administrative staff felt they were often being used by the state as a
“political pawn” and expressed a lack of faith in the decision-makers at the federal level. They recognized that decisions made at the federal level are often done by those that are not in education. While participants commented on areas of opportunity within the district there was a belief, demonstrated in the focus groups that the district was doing the best they could with the resources that they have.

The rate of educational change as a result of reform efforts in Florida can be overwhelming for educators. There is an understanding that the end result is student success and a belief that many of the changes have resulted in a better understanding of students. Teachers are now aware of their English Language Learners (ELL), special education and economically disadvantaged students which they often target with additional instructional practices. In addition, educators credit these changes in allowing them to become more reflective of their practice and utilize skills that have helped them become better educators. Educators want time to process the change occurring and be provided with training that will allow them to feel continued success in their practice.

Limitations

Southview Middle School is a school experiencing wide-scale changes in a state known for a high level of educational reform. The research study desired to capture educational reform at the school level and seek to understand educators’ perspectives. The small sample size located in one middle school within the district provides a brief, yet important perspective from educators. One limitation is this case study presented the perspective of a single school site. The
perceptions do not reflect teachers working in elementary, high schools or vocational schools throughout the county.

Additional research would be needed to provide a cross-section of perspectives from various schools within the district. Capturing perspectives across districts within the state would also provide a deeper understanding of how reform efforts are influencing educators. In addition, obtaining a district-level perspective would provide a unique viewpoint in understanding the implications of educational reform.

**Significance and Possible Implications of the Study**

This research study was informed using the Burke-Litwin theory of organizational change. It is through the perspective of this theory that themes were identified to better understand educators’ outlook of educational reform, past and present. The themes and findings were resonant with the current review of literature and the theoretical framework.

Over the past decade public schools have been faced with reform expectations handed down from the federal level, to the states, and eventually down to the districts and individual schools. There is a great deal of discussion concerning the implications of federal initiatives targeting education. For decades we have wondered if we are adequately preparing students for a global economy and providing them with the 21st century skills others have identified as critical. As a result we have attempted to find the answers to problems that appear to lie within a deeper sociological level through educational reform. The new reform measures negate some of the root causes for low student performance. The mandates fail to address the importance of parental involvement or the how poverty impacts student performance. Instead of
truly identifying the problems that prevent student success, reform efforts appear to keep a sole focus only on schools. Teachers, in particular, end up being the scapegoat for students being unsuccessful on the state test.

The federal government has implemented reform expectations to address standards and accountability and these efforts have been employed using a top-down approach. As a result, educators are feeling left out of the conversation and decisions – policy, strategy, and practice decisions – are made without their input. Reform efforts over the last few years have been viewed as punitive towards educators, especially teachers, and many have expressed a desire to leave the profession as a result. It is this researcher’s opinion that it is vital that educational reform includes the voice of those educators that are being affected because they are the ones in the classroom and can offer that much needed perspective.

The Marzano Causal instrument needs to be utilized the way it was intended, as a tool for teacher education not for teacher evaluation. Teachers recognize the value in learning the Marzano indicators and applying them to the classroom. The problem is the Marzano evaluation is not a practical means to evaluate teachers. Teachers and administrators cited the framework as a great tool for instructional practice but not for evaluating teachers. Teaching is subjective and so are evaluations therefore if the current evaluation process remains there needs to be more training on inter-rater reliability so when a teacher transfers to another school there will be consistency in the evaluations.

It is the researcher’s opinion that the districts within the state are forced to adopt a “wait and see” attitude when it comes to reform efforts from the state. The reason is largely due to the
political wrangling that delays successful implementation of a reform effort. Reform targeting standards has been mired in confusion and educators within the focus group expressed that they are left to wonder what will happen next. According to teachers within the focus groups, training on the new standards has been minimal yet teachers are expected to utilize the new standards in their curriculum culminating in an undetermined test at the end of the year. Teachers pointed out that the district put a halt to textbook adoption for many subject areas due to this uncertainty in the new standards. It is the researcher’s opinion that indecisiveness and politics are costing taxpayers and educators dearly at the expense of students. Despite all of these changes the educators within the focus group and one-on-one interview still saw the value in public education and a belief that the work they are doing is important.

The findings from this case study can help the state to understand how reform is influencing educators. In addition, school districts can utilize the information to recognize the gaps in training for both teachers and administrative staff. Also it is crucial to analyze how reform translates from the federal government to the classroom after it goes through many channels.

**Future Studies**

The following list signifies recommendations for future studies that address understanding educators’ perspectives towards educational reform. Future studies may include: multiple case studies utilizing several schools within the district and/or state. Since this study strictly focused on one high performing school obtaining a varied perspective might provide useful insight. There is a benefit in determining if certain schools share the same thoughts about
education reform and its implementation within their school. The advantage would also include additional perspectives on the district and state’s handling of reform efforts.

- case study which includes district level personnel directly affected by reform. Understanding how the district office receives, interprets and disseminates reform measures would provide a unique viewpoint into an important aspect of educational reform. Insight from district-level educators could provide an understanding of how they roll out the reform measures, what type of control do they have over the timeline and how they approach any professional development associated with reform efforts.

- explore a similar study as the one presented but include students’ perspectives. Having students’ perspectives about educational reform would provide a unique opportunity to understand how these efforts are impacting them. Determining if they understand the process and purpose of educational reform would be interesting. Understanding the positive and negative influence of reform on students would also offer a vital perspective in the cycle of educational change.

- investigate using additional perspectives from federal level personnel directly involved in reform efforts. Additional insight from federal level personnel that are directly involved in reform efforts would provide a level of understanding into the reform process. The goal would be an understanding of how federal-level personnel perceive reform efforts within the state. In addition, researching their perspective to determine the flow of information the federal level down to schools. Understanding the challenges and
successes of previous educational reform efforts through the perspective of individuals working at the state level would provide a crucial perspective.

**Personal Reflection**

I was born in Florida and spent most of my years attending public schools in the state. It wasn’t until my family moved to New Hampshire during the start of high school that I realized that education was not consistent within the country. Attending Exeter Area High School in Exeter New Hampshire I did feel left behind by the state of Florida. I struggled academically throughout my years in public school which I know was a result of low motivation on my part as well as a system that was not addressing me as a learner. As a teacher in the state of Florida I realize that our curriculum has been compressed and the requirements for college have become more rigorous.

I began my career in education in 2007 and realized that education seemed to be burdened by a lot of red tape. Certification requirements, testing and needed endorsements to obtain and retain employment was overwhelming. Every year it seemed a new suggestion was being made to obtain a certification in order to keep your job.

Before I became an educator I thought very little of education reform. Once I entered the classroom I witnessed first-hand the effect of No Child Left Behind. I was required to partake in the “common board configuration,” present the results of the latest benchmark test and conduct research that targeted student success towards the then Sunshine State Standards. I also determined that much of our time is spent testing students, categorizing them and attempting to place them in a box so we could either praise them or attempt to fix them. The time spent testing
was relentless yet that appeared to be the only solution to the problem. Over the past few years I feel there has been an increase in the amount of days we spend as teachers assessing students on state benchmarks and I question the degree to which these assessments in the end truly benefit our students. I feel the system of high-stakes testing and “accountability” is antiquated and relies solely on testing at the expense of the student.

The system breeds fear in both students and educators who tend to focus on the test rather than the individual student. I have noticed, within education, there is a level of fear that prevents educators from having a real discussion about their concerns. The discussions that took place within the focus groups and interview had a level of restraint from newer teachers. Veteran teachers expressed concern with the endless reform efforts however. It appeared that veteran teachers were used to this uncertainty and more open to share the challenges faced navigating the uncertain landscape. I believe the same policies intended to increase teacher efficacy has created an environment where educators feel restricted to discuss how policies are impacting their work, possibly for the worse.

Living in Florida and being an educator I have a unique perspective of reform efforts that influence education. As an educator within the state I have experienced many of the reform efforts discussed in the research paper. I have witnessed education reform to be important during an election year. Reform in education is always popular amongst politicians when pursuing office always promising a better system that would benefit student success. I notice that teachers are rarely part of the conversation but seem to be affected the most. I also notice that students
are rarely part of the conversation regarding reform which, in the end, directly impacts them. To me it seems obvious that these two perspectives are imperative when discussing education. It was my intent to present at least one perspective on educational change through the eyes of the educators affected by it.
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Appendix A
Initial Participant Recruitment Letter – e-mail

Dear Colleagues:

My name is Melissa Vardas and I am a doctoral candidate in the College of Professional Studies at Northeastern University and a Language Arts teacher at our school. As part of my dissertation research, I am conducting a study about the influence of federally mandated policy on a school focusing on the Common Core State Standards and Marzano Causal evaluations.

In order to gather data about this research, I am inviting you to participate in my study. As educators you provide vital insight into how federal policy affects a school. The goal is to understand how policy moves from the federal, state, district and school.

Once I receive approval from Northeastern University, I will formally request your participation. At this time, I am simply looking for an initial interest response from site participants involved with our school. Please be aware that agreeing or not agreeing to participate in this study will have no reflection on your work within the school or as a teacher at the school, whatsoever. Also, any participation in the study will be completely confidential; names and other personal information will not be used.

Please respond via e-mail to melissa_vardas@scps.k12.fl.us if you are interested or have any questions. Thank you in advance for your time.

~Melissa Vardas
Appendix B
Signed Informed Consent Document

Northeastern University, College of Professional Studies
Investigator Name: Melissa Vardas
Title of Project: The influence of federal policy on educators
Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study

Why am I being asked to take part in this research study?
You have been asked to participate since you expressed an initial interest in participating from a request letter sent in February 2014.

Why is this research study being done?
The purpose of this study is to identify and describe the influence of federally mandated educational policy on a school. Looking specifically at the Common Core State Standards and the Marzano Causal evaluations. Through a case study model, interviews and focus groups will be conducted with faculty members. The goal is to determine how policy translates in a top down approach and how it influences teachers and administrators within a specific school.

What will I be asked to do?
The researcher will be looking for you to participate in the following ways:

1. Participate in an interview session that will be audio taped or
2. Participate in a focus group session that will be audio taped

Your participation is voluntary, and you can opt out at any time.

Where will this take place and how much time will it take?
The focus group sessions will last approximately one hour. Interviews and focus groups will take place in a conference room or classroom at our school at a convenient time for participants.

Will there be any risk or discomfort to me?
There are no significant risks involved in being a participant in this study.

Will I benefit by being in this research?
Benefits will include the opportunity for site participants to reflect how federal policies impact their daily work.

Who will see the information about me?
Your part in the study will be completely confidential. Pseudonyms will be used for all study participants. Only the researcher will be aware of the participants' identities. No reports or publications will use information that can identify you in any way.

As a focus group participant, your part will be confidential. The other participants in your focus group will hear your ideas, but confidentiality will be discussed with all participants. The data collected for this study will be kept by the researcher, including audio tapes, and will not be shared with others. Only first names will be used during focus group sessions and in transcriptions. False names will be used in reports related to focus groups. All audio tapes will be destroyed following transcription.

In rare instances, authorized people may request to see research information about you and other people in this study. This is done only to be sure that the research is done properly. The researcher would only permit people who are authorized by organizations such as Northeastern University to see this information. No identifying information will ever be shared with people at our school.

If I do not want to take part in the study, what choices do I have?
You are not required to take part in this study. If you do not want to participate, you do not have to sign this form.

What will happen if I suffer any harm from this research?
There are no significant risks involved in being a participant in this study.

Can I stop my participation in this study?
Participation in this study is voluntary, and your participation or non-participation will not in any way affect other relationships (e.g., employer, school, etc.). You may discontinue your participation in this research program at any time without penalty or costs of any nature, character, or kind.

Who can I contact if I have questions or problems?
Melissa Vardas
152 Canterbury Bell Dr
Oviedo FL, 32765
Cell#(407)488-0849
E-mail: Melissa_vardas@scps.k12.fl.us
Christopher Unger, Ed. D.
College of Professional Studies
360 Huntington Avenue (BV 20)
Email: c.unger@neu.edu

Who can I contact about my rights as a participant?
If you have any questions about your rights as a participant, you may contact_______. You may call anonymously if you wish.

**Will I be paid for my participation?**
There is no compensation for participation in this study.

**Will it cost me anything to participate?**
There is no cost to participate in this study.

I have read, understood, and had the opportunity to ask questions regarding this consent form. I fully understand the nature and character of my involvement in this research program as a participant and the potential risks. Should I be selected, I agree to participate in this study on a voluntary basis.

____________________________________
Research Participant (Printed Name)

____________________________________
____________________________________
Research Participant (Signature)
Date
Appendix C

Teacher Focus Group Questions

INTRODUCTION

Part I: Introductory Question Objectives (5-7 minutes): Build rapport, describe the study, answer any questions, review and sign IRB protocol and form for tape recording.

Introductory Protocol

You have been selected to speak with me today because you have been identified as someone who has a great deal to share the impact of federal policy within your job as an educator. This research project focuses on the influence of the Common Core State Standards and Marzano Causal evaluation on educators. Through this study we hope to gain insight into how these policies influence you as an educator and impact your approach towards your job.

Because your responses are important and I want to make sure to capture everything you say, I would like to audio tape our conversation today. I will also be taking written notes during the interview. I can assure you that all responses will be confidential and only a pseudonym will be used when quoting from the transcripts. The tapes will be transcribed by a transcriptionist, but the pseudonym will be used to label the tapes. I will be the only one privy to transcripts which will be kept in a locked filing cabinet and the tapes will be destroyed after they are transcribed.

To meet our human subjects requirements at the university, you must sign the form I have with me (provide the form). Essentially, this document states that: (1) all information will be held confidential, (2) your participation is voluntary and you may stop at any time if you feel uncomfortable, and (3) we do not intend to inflict any harm (allow time to review form). Do you have any questions about the interview process or this form? I would also like to audio tape this interview and have a consent form related to this as well (provide form).

We have planned this interview to last no longer than 45 to one hour minutes. During this time, I have several questions that I would like to cover. If time begins to run short, it may be necessary to interrupt you in order to push ahead and complete this line of questioning. Do you have any questions at this time?

A. Interviewee Background – My name is Melissa Vardas and I am a doctoral student at Northeastern University. I am presently working on my dissertation. I have been a teacher since 2007 and previously
**Background**

1. Tell me about your past experiences in education. Where have you worked, what grades/subjects have you taught in the past?
2. What were your responsibilities there?
3. What is your experience in the past with federally mandated policy changes that impacted education?

**Current Work**

1. Tell me what your current position is within the school?
2. How long have you been employed with your current position and have you ever changed positions within this school?

**Marzano Causal**

1. As you know the state of Florida adopted the new Marzano Causal evaluation, what has your role been in implementing this new procedure?
2. Can you describe how this is different than the previous evaluative process?
3. Explain the types of professional development or any trainings you attended? What did you do to prepare for the new evaluation? Explain?
4. What seems to be working? Can you provide examples/explain?
5. What are the challenges? Can you provide examples/explain?
6. What do you think of the efforts within the school towards the new evaluation process?
7. What do you think of the efforts within the district?
8. What do you think of the efforts within the state?
9. What do you think about the impact of the Marzano teacher evaluations on student achievement?

**Common Core State Standards**

1. As you know the state of Florida adopted the Common Core State Standards, what has your role been in implementing this new procedure?
2. Explain the types of professional development or any training you attended? Explain?
3. What seems to be working? Can you provide examples/explain?
4. What are the challenges? Can you provide examples/explain?
5. How will the new standards alter your approach to your classroom? Can you provide examples/explain?
6. What do you think of the efforts within the school towards implementation of the new standards?
7. What do you think of the efforts within the district?
8. What do you think of the efforts within the state?
9. How will these new standards impact student achievement?

**Compare/Contrast**

1. In what ways are the current federal initiatives different or similar than changes that occurred in the past?
Appendix D

Focus Group Questions-Administration

INTRODUCTION

Part I: Introductory Question Objectives (5-7 minutes): Build rapport, describe the study, answer any questions, review and sign IRB protocol and form for tape recording.

Introductory Protocol

You have been selected to speak with me today because you have been identified as someone who has a great deal to share the impact of federal policy within your job as an educator. This research project focuses on the influence of the Common Core State Standards and Marzano Causal evaluation on educators. Through this study we hope to gain insight into how these policies influence you as an educator and impact your approach towards your job.

Because your responses are important and I want to make sure to capture everything you say, I would like to audio tape our conversation today. I will also be taking written notes during the interview. I can assure you that all responses will be confidential and only a pseudonym will be used when quoting from the transcripts. The tapes will be transcribed by a transcriptionist, but the pseudonym will be used to label the tapes. I will be the only one privy to transcripts which will be kept in a locked filing cabinet and the tapes will be destroyed after they are transcribed.

To meet our human subjects requirements at the university, you must sign the form I have with me (provide the form). Essentially, this document states that: (1) all information will be held confidential, (2) your participation is voluntary and you may stop at any time if you feel uncomfortable, and (3) we do not intend to inflict any harm (allow time to review form). Do you have any questions about the interview process or this form? I would also like to audio tape this interview and have a consent form related to this as well (provide form).

We have planned this interview to last no longer than 45 to one hour minutes. During this time, I have several questions that I would like to cover. If time begins to run short, it may be necessary to interrupt you in order to push ahead and complete this line of questioning. Do you have any questions at this time?

Introduction

B. Interviewee Background – My name is Melissa Vardas and I am a doctoral student at Northeastern University. I am presently working on my dissertation. I have been a teacher since 2007 and previously
Background

1. Tell me about your past experiences in education. Where have you worked, what grades/subjects have you taught in the past?
2. What were your responsibilities there?
3. What is your experience in the past with federally mandated policy changes that impacted education?

Current Work

1. Tell me what your current position is within the school?
2. How long have you been employed with your current position and have you ever changed positions within this school?

Marzano Causal

1. As you know the state of Florida adopted the new Marzano Causal evaluation, what has your role been in implementing this new procedure?
2. Can you describe how this is different than the previous evaluative process?
3. Explain the types of professional development or any training you attended? What did you do to prepare for the new evaluation? Explain?
4. Tell me how teachers have responded to this new process? Can you provide examples/explain?
5. What seems to be working? Can you provide examples/explain?
6. What are the challenges? Can you provide examples/explain?
7. What do you think of the efforts within the school towards the new evaluation process?
8. What do you think of the efforts within the district?
9. What do you think of the efforts within the state?
10. What do you think about the impact of the Marzano teacher evaluations on student achievement?

Common Core State Standards

1. As you know the state of Florida adopted the Common Core State Standards, what has your role been in implementing this new procedure?
2. Explain the types of professional development or any training you attended? Explain?
3. How have teachers responded to the new standards?
4. What seems to be working? Can you provide examples/explain?
5. What are the challenges? Can you provide examples/explain?
6. What do you think of the efforts within the school towards implementation of the new standards?
7. What do you think of the efforts within the district?
8. What do you think of the efforts within the state?
9. How will these new standards impact student achievement?

**Compare/Contrast**

1. In what ways are the current federal initiatives different or similar than changes that occurred in the past?
Appendix E

Interview Questions-Principal

INTRODUCTION

Part I: Introductory Question Objectives (5-7 minutes): Build rapport, describe the study, answer any questions, review and sign IRB protocol and form for tape recording.

Introductory Protocol

You have been selected to speak with me today because you have been identified as someone who has a great deal to share the impact of federal policy within your job as an educator. This research project focuses on the influence of the Common Core State Standards and Marzano Causal evaluation on educators. Through this study we hope to gain insight into how these policies influence you as an educator and impact your approach towards your job.

Because your responses are important and I want to make sure to capture everything you say, I would like to audio tape our conversation today. I will also be taking written notes during the interview. I can assure you that all responses will be confidential and only a pseudonym will be used when quoting from the transcripts. The tapes will be transcribed by a transcriptionist, but the pseudonym will be used to label the tapes. I will be the only one privy to transcripts which will be kept in a locked filing cabinet and the tapes will be destroyed after they are transcribed.

To meet our human subjects requirements at the university, you must sign the form I have with me (provide the form). Essentially, this document states that: (1) all information will be held confidential, (2) your participation is voluntary and you may stop at any time if you feel uncomfortable, and (3) we do not intend to inflict any harm (allow time to review form). Do you have any questions about the interview process or this form? I would also like to audio tape this interview and have a consent form related to this as well (provide form).

We have planned this interview to last no longer than 45 to one hour minutes. During this time, I have several questions that I would like to cover. If time begins to run short, it may be necessary to interrupt you in order to push ahead and complete this line of questioning. Do you have any questions at this time?

Introduction

C. Interviewee Background – My name is Melissa Vardas and I am a doctoral student at Northeastern University. I am presently working on my dissertation. I have been a teacher since 2007 and previously
Background

1. Tell me about your past experiences in education. Where have you worked, what grades/subjects/administrative responsibilities have you had in the past?
2. What were your responsibilities there?
3. What is your experience in the past with federally mandated policy changes that impacted education?

Current Work

1. Tell me what your current position is within the school?
2. How long have you been employed with your current position and have you ever changed positions within this school?
3. What is your experience in the past with federally mandated policy changes that impacted education?

Marzano Causal

1. As you know the state of Florida adopted the new Marzano Causal evaluation, what has your role been in implementing this new procedure?
2. Can you explain how the school began implementing this process?
3. Can you describe how this is different than the previous evaluative process?
4. Explain the types of professional development or any trainings you attended? What did you do to prepare for the new evaluation? Explain?
5. Tell me how teachers have responded to this new process? Can you provide examples/explain?
6. What seems to be working? Can you provide examples/explain?
7. What are the challenges? Can you provide examples/explain?
8. What do you think of the efforts within the school towards the new evaluation process?
9. What do you think of the efforts within the district?
10. What do you think of the efforts within the state?
11. What do you think about the impact of the Marzano teacher evaluations on student achievement?

Common Core State Standards

1. As you know the state of Florida adopted the Common Core State Standards, what has your role been in implementing this new procedure?
2. Explain the types of professional development or any training you attended? Explain?
3. How have teachers responded to the new standards?
4. What seems to be working? Can you provide examples/explain?
5. What are the challenges? Can you provide examples/explain?
6. What do you think of the efforts within the school towards implementation of the new standards?
7. What do you think of the efforts within the district?
8. What do you think of the efforts within the state?
9. How will these new standards impact student achievement?

*Compare/Contrast*

2. In what ways are the current federal initiatives different or similar than changes that occurred in the past?