

THE CHOICE AND IMPLICATION OF STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT GOALS IN
VIRGINIA ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL PERFORMANCE EVALUATION POLICY

by

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Dedication

Sharon, A. J., Madison, Grant, and Reagan

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List of Abbreviations

| | |
|---|-------|
| Adequate Yearly Progress | AYP |
| American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009..... | ARRA |
| Elementary and Secondary Education Act..... | ESEA |
| English Language Learner..... | ELL |
| Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015..... | ESSA |
| Local Educational Agencies..... | LEA |
| No Child Left Behind Act of 2001..... | NCLB |
| Standards of Accreditation..... | SOA |
| Standards of Learning..... | SOL |
| United States Department of Education..... | USDOE |
| Virginia Department of Education..... | VDOE |

Abstract

THE CHOICE AND IMPLICATION OF STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT GOALS IN VIRGINIA ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL PERFORMANCE EVALUATION POLICY

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Increased federal government involvement in state education policy has resulted in forced changes at the state and local levels. These top-down changes have included a mandated requirement that an individually selected student achievement goal count for 40% of an assistant principal's employee performance evaluation. The purpose of this study is to examine the use of student achievement goals in Virginia assistant principal evaluations including how the goals are determined, what job tasks the assistant principals perform that relate to the student achievement goal, and what factors influence the choice and implementation of these goals. This study used a research-informed survey to examine the choices, factors of influence, and job task relationship on the assistant principal student achievement goal.

Using both qualitative and quantitative methods, this study found that most assistant principals chose student achievement goals related to the new system of evaluating schools. In addition, although the assistant principals report that they feel

more effective at their jobs and provided focus for the work of assistant principals, they report little control over the job tasks that relate to the student achievement goals.

Assistant principals reported having a goal to comply with the law or a goal not related to the curriculum or subject area they supervise, but a goal that was chosen for them. Few participants in this study received professional development from a source other than their principal. In addition, a majority reported that they set the student achievement goal with their principal, leaving the principal as the sole source of information and input into the subject and measurement of the student achievement goal. There were two significant relationships found using a chi-square analysis for this study. There was a relationship between the assistant principal's school level and the topic of the student achievement goal, and there was a relationship between the school district location and the topic of the student achievement goal.

Beyond this study, research should focus on the purpose of assistant principal evaluation – to evaluate based on the job they are doing versus evaluating against the promotion to the principalship or is the evaluation set to be reflective or punitive, how the student achievement goal can be used to focus on the professional development of the assistant principals, the job tasks of the assistant principal as related to the evaluation, and how the assistant principal job tasks focus on instructional leadership. The Virginia Department of Education and other government organizations have an opportunity to reflect on how policy is constructed. As is currently under review, adjustment of the quantitative value of the student achievement goal in the assistant principal evaluation so it promotes risk taking. A more articulate job description of the assistant principal by

VDOE that better reflects the current reality and development of a performance evaluation and professional development tailored to the position is warranted. Once the job description and job tasks are aligned, the VDOE can better align the assistant principal evaluation so that it is not a replication of the principal evaluation but an evaluation that can promote reflection and growth to prepare for the principalship. The Virginia Department of Education should also evaluate the fidelity of implementation of the student achievement goal and guidelines for promotion to the assistant principalship and from the assistant principalship to the principalship.

Keywords: Assistant principal, student achievement goals, performance evaluations, ESSA, NCLB, Race to the Top

Chapter One

In the current era of education reform, there has been a shift from changes that happen organically at the local level and flow out to the whole education community to a complete systematic overhaul of education policy from the national level down to the local educational agencies (Sykes, Schneider, & Plank, 2009). This causes alarm for some, because what works for one local educational agency does not always fit another, and implementation is not uniform (Close, Amrein-Beardsley, & Collins, 2019). However, the national view of educational policy is that there is a need for swift and substantial changes in education. This perspective has resulted in federally mandated and coerced policies. Professional educational personnel evaluations are part of the ongoing and current reform efforts at the national level. At the federal level, there is an increased effort not only to focus on student achievement but also to provide a standard measure to demonstrate the effectiveness of educational personnel. As such, the Obama administration, led by Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, instituted a policy to include standardized test score data in performance evaluations through the student achievement goal standard.

In response to changes in federal requirements regarding the evaluation of school administrators, the Commonwealth of Virginia changed existing policy documents to reflect new requirements. Virginia Code § 22.1-253 was modified to reflect changes in

evaluation criteria – most importantly, accountability for student achievement. The new assistant principal evaluation procedures were developed, documented, and began in Virginia on July 1, 2013. The assistant principal evaluation procedures are the same as the principal evaluation procedures. The new criteria reflect changes to federal policy, as required by the No Child Left Behind waiver granted to Virginia¹. The Virginia Department of Education used a research synthesis conducted by Dr. James Stronge of the College of William and Mary to justify the structure of the new administrator evaluation model. Dr. Stronge’s synthesis relies heavily on research conducted by Waters, Marzano, and McNulty regarding the effects of assistant principal leadership on student achievement (Stronge, 2012). This policy is designed to provide school divisions with an accurate evaluation of the effectiveness of administrators in a school and on student achievement (VA Department of Education, 2012). When the United States Congress began the reauthorization process for the No Child Left Behind law, they created The Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015. The new law continues to require that states focus on student achievement as part of personnel evaluations.

This study examines the perspectives of assistant principals in K-12 Virginia public schools regarding the use of the student achievement goals in their annual performance evaluations. A survey was administered to examine how assistant principals choose the student achievement goal upon which they are evaluated and who is involved in the goal-setting process. Furthermore, survey questions examined how the assistant

¹ Although NCLB was reauthorized as the ESSA, at the time of this study, policies in Virginia were still following the evaluation rules under the NCLB waiver.

principal relates his or her job tasks and responsibilities to the student achievement goal in the performance evaluation.

Legislative History

Federal government involvement. The federal government garnered an increased involvement in education during the twentieth century. Per Cross (2010), the *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) decision from the Supreme Court provided an opening for the federal government to increase participation in education. As part of the civil rights movement, the Kennedy and Johnson administrations sought to increase federal involvement in education for the purpose of ensuring that education was not based on race or income; both administrations made education a civil rights issue through the end of the century (Cross, 2010).

On April 11, 1965, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) was signed into law by President Lyndon B. Johnson (Cross, 2010). The ESEA is the landmark federal law regarding the establishment of federal involvement in K-12 education. ESEA officially banned the establishment of a national curriculum; however, it provided funding for professional development, instructional materials, and resources to support educational programs and to promote parental involvement (P.L. 89-10). Initially, the law was to be authorized through 1970. The mission of the legislation was to provide equal access to education and to promote high standards of accountability. By providing fair and equal opportunities to education, this legislation sought to remove the achievement gaps that had persisted due to race and income (P.L. 89-10). According to

Cross (2010), Congress reauthorized this legislation every five years through 2001. In 2001 the reauthorized bill was renamed the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001.

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 provided an increased focus on the achievement gaps (Cross, 2010). No Child Left Behind was a bipartisan effort in both chambers of the United States Congress. It was co-authored by Representative John Boehner, a Republican from Ohio; Representative George Miller, a Democrat from California; and in the Senate, Senator Edward Kennedy, a Democrat from Massachusetts; and Senator Judd Gregg, a Republican from New Hampshire (P.L. 107-110). The bill passed with bipartisan support in both chambers and was signed by President George W. Bush on January 8, 2002 (P.L. 107-110). The reauthorization of the law was to be completed by Congress in 2007; however, Congress and the president failed to complete the action. The failure of action caused the law to continue as it was written, with significant financial consequences for school divisions that failed to reach perfection by 2014 (P.L. 107-110).

As part of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, Title 1 of the law was changed to provide increased accountability for the achievement of Hispanic, black, disabled, and economically disadvantaged students. The focus of Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for students was to grow student achievement in reading and mathematics while also decreasing the gaps among disadvantaged subgroups (Lomax, 2011). States were required to develop standards and to test students for the ability to demonstrate the standards in grades three through eight and then once in high school, and results were to be used to determine whether schools, local educational agencies, and states were

meeting the academic targets (Lomax, 2011). Under the goals of No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, a higher percentage of students were required to pass the grade level, standards-based tests for the school to demonstrate Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). Under the guidelines of the legislation, school districts were required to achieve a 100% pass rate for both reading and math at the conclusion of the 2013-2014 school year (P.L. 107-110).

Under the guidelines of AYP, achievement test data on students were to be divided into subgroups of the population. These subgroups included students who were Hispanic, African American, Economically Disadvantaged, Limited English Proficiency, and Students with Disabilities (P.L. 107-110). The rationale behind reporting test score data by subgroups was that it would allow policymakers and educators to determine if children with certain characteristics or backgrounds were underperforming and a remediation requirement would take effect (Lomax, 2011). Under the provisions for AYP, schools that fail to achieve the graduated benchmarks for performance face increasing sanctions until the loss of funding and control of the school are deemed necessary by the provisions of the law (P.L. 107 -110). For most schools, these sanctions began taking effect in earnest in 2007. This was not the only provision of the No Child Left Behind Act; however, it had the largest effect on the movement toward greater accountability and ultimately the changes that were presented as conditions for the waivers from these sections of the law. The law continued to be carried out despite not having a full reauthorization. In addition, both the Bush and Obama administrations often used executive authority to enforce or excuse certain provisions of the law.

The punitive aspects of the AYP provisions (less money available from the federal government among schools that were not achieving at the required levels) and the Great Recession that began in 2008 combined to create shrinking funding available for schools through property taxes because of plummeting housing prices. In addition, lower than normal state sales and income tax revenues caused school districts to seek alternatives to the provisions of AYP to restore some federal funding. Although costs vary by state, this mandate, along with many others contained in the law, were never fully funded, leading to a rising financial burden on state and local governments (Lomax, 2011). The Obama administration provided relief through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA). Through ARRA (P.L. 111-5), the provision “Innovation and Improvement” allowed for the use of \$200 million to provide incentives for states to adopt a performance-based teacher and principal compensation systems (P.L. 111-5). To be eligible to receive the funds, states had to agree to make student achievement part of education personnel evaluations. The U.S. Department of Education established that 40% of the evaluations of education personnel should be tied to student achievement. Each state was required to establish guidelines for the measurement of student achievement in the performance evaluation (Students First, 2013).

Virginia’s Superintendent of Schools applied for the waiver from the provision of the No Child Left Behind law on February 28, 2012. Upon receipt of the application, the U.S. Department of Education conducted a peer review panel from March 26, 2012, through March 30, 2012. The findings of the U.S. Department of Education panel and areas for revision were presented to the Virginia Board of Education on April 17, 2012.

Virginia’s Board of Education acted on the requested revisions and provided a revised waiver request on June 1, 2012. Virginia was granted a No Child Left Behind waiver on June 29, 2012, in part because of the willingness of the Commonwealth to change the accountability provisions of educational personnel evaluations (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). The new teacher evaluations took effect on July 1, 2012, and the administrator (assistant principal, principal, and superintendent) evaluations took effect on July 1, 2013.

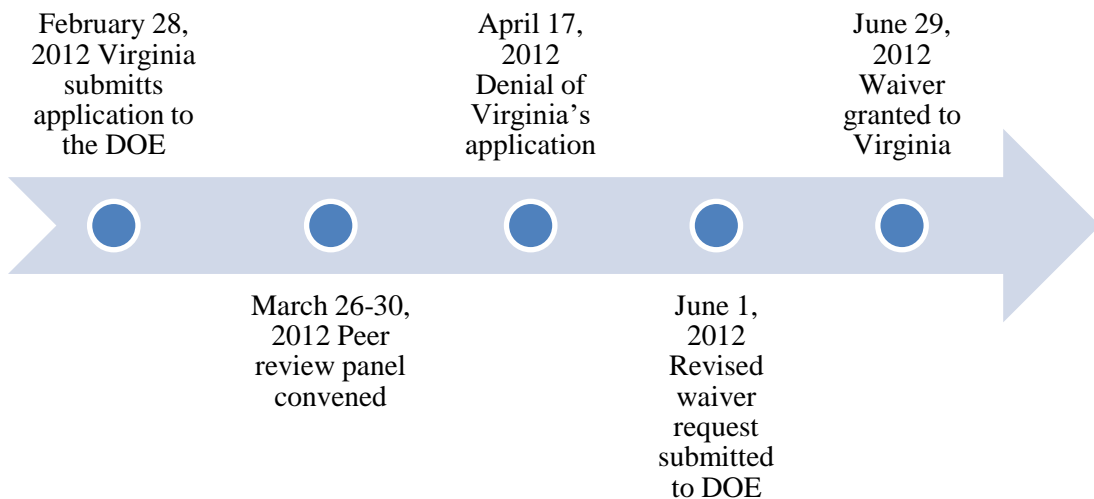


Figure 1. Timeline of the No Child Left Behind Waiver for Virginia.

On December 10, 2015, President Barack Obama signed the most recent reauthorization of the United States Department of Education. The Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 (ESSA), P.L. 114-95, continued the use of student achievement data in educational personnel evaluations. To support including student achievement data in educational personnel evaluations, as well as to continue to focus on the civil rights

issues of traditionally underserved populations, ESSA continues to require academic testing at the end of each school year in grades three through eight and then once in high school for both literacy and mathematics. Science is required to be tested in elementary, middle, and high school. In pursuit of this objective, the states were required to continue to develop high-quality assessments that would allow students to demonstrate mastery of rigorous content while reducing barriers for students with disabilities by allowing access to accommodations and using universal design that allows better access for English Language Learners (U.S. Department of Education, 2017).

To reduce the amount of testing conducted by local educational agencies, the U.S. Department of Education sought to reduce testing time for mandatory state assessments to less than 2% of a student's time spent in school (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). The movement in ESSA away from mandated, inflexible, multiple-choice tests toward fewer rigorous, curricula-aligned assessments that allowed for ingenuity also created an opportunity for state educational agencies to choose additional metrics upon which to assess student success (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). Along with the traditional overall achievement and achievement group focus, the Every Student Succeeds Act established indicators around student engagement. These additional areas include the use of graduation and drop-out rates, attendance rates, and a provision for college, career, and civic readiness (P.L.114-95, Title IV). In this last provision, ESSA enables state educational agencies to allow local educational agencies to track coursework in career and technical education, workforce experiences, service learning, internships, and co-ops.

This allows schools to help students develop skills and dispositions for life beyond a K-12 environment (U.S. Department of Education, 2017).

Virginia. Prior to the No Child Left Behind Act waiver, Virginia's educational personnel were evaluated under the Virginia law known as the Education Accountability and Quality Enhancement Act of 1999. Established as H.B. 2710 and S.B.1145, the law provided for three types of evaluation: Superintendent Evaluation, Administrator Evaluation, and Instructional Personnel Evaluation. These standards were designed to be consistent with and supportive of Virginia's Standards of Learning, to focus on performance in areas of student achievement and safety, to connect aspects of the job from tasks to evaluation, to clarify expectations, to provide context for improving employee performance, to align criteria with the teacher and administrator preparation programs, to provide consistency across all school divisions, and to focus attention and resources on student learning (Virginia Department of Education, 1999).

The evaluation categories for administrators under the guidelines provided in 1999 included five major areas: Planning and Assessment, Instructional Leadership, Safety and Organizational Management for Learning, Communication and Community Relations, and Professionalism. Each area included between four and five subcategories to be evaluated. The guidelines provided by the Virginia Department of Education also included a prototype evaluation for adoption at the local school divisions. The guidelines encouraged local educational agencies to begin with the job description of all employees to ensure that they reflect the organizational and division goals. From this evaluation,

modifications were made to personnel evaluations (Virginia Department of Education, 1999).

Under the 1999 law, the collection of data was prominently placed in Domain 1: Planning and Assessment for Administrators; however, the dedication of a large percentage of the evaluation to student achievement was not present. Instead, this portion of the evaluation was equal to the other four provisions. In addition, it allowed for and encouraged the use of multiple sources of data, not just standardized test scores as a measure of student achievement.

As discussed previously, changes to Virginia's law were required to obtain a waiver from the No Child Left Behind Act provisions. The specific change to the Code of Virginia required that the school boards' procedures for evaluating principals address student academic performance (Virginia Department of Education, 2012). As required by the changes to the law, the Virginia Department of Education updated the guidelines on all educational personnel evaluations. Published on February 23, 2012, the *Guidelines for Uniform Performance Standards and Evaluation Criteria for Principals* took effect on July 1, 2013. This document describes the new requirements for principal and assistant principal evaluation. It provides the new standards by which administrators are evaluated across the Commonwealth of Virginia.

Under the Virginia 2012 guidelines, administrators (assistant principals and principals) are evaluated on seven standards. These seven standards are the following: Instructional Leadership, School Climate, Human Resources Management, Organizational Management, Communication and Community Relations,

Professionalism, and Student Academic Progress. The final standard – Student Academic Progress – counts for 40% of the administrator’s performance evaluation. The remaining six categories count for 10 percentage points each (Virginia Department of Education, 2012). The establishment of 40% is grounded in the findings of the Measures of Effective Teaching Project funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. The Measures of Effective Teaching Project’s results recommend that student achievement account for between 33% and 50% of teacher evaluations. Its findings present evidence that if student achievement accounts for less than 33%, it “loses predictive power for future evaluations” (Gates Foundation, 2013). Each performance standard has between nine and 13 possible performance indicators that are eligible for adoption by the local educational agency.

Table 1. Personnel Evaluation Standards Comparison

| 1999 Personnel Evaluation Standards | 2013 Personnel Evaluation Standards |
|--|--|
| 1. Planning and Assessment | 1. Instructional Leadership – 10% |
| 2. Instructional Leadership | 2. School Climate – 10% |
| 3. Safety and Organizational Management for Learning | 3. Human Resources Management – 10% |
| 4. Communication and Community Relations | 4. Organizational Management – 10% |
| 5. Professionalism | 5. Communication and Community Relations – 10% |
| | 6. Professionalism – 10% |
| | 7. Student Academic Progress – 40% |

As part of continuing research on instructional leadership, the Virginia Department of Education has posited that if an administrator is successful in the other aspects of the performance evaluation, then standard seven would be a natural extension of that success (Virginia Department of Education, 2012). There are samples and suggestions regarding the ways in which school divisions may implement the new principal evaluations as part of the *Guidelines for Uniform Performance Standards and Evaluation Criteria for Principals* (2012). Of considerable note is that the Virginia Department of Education does not require that school districts adopt all, some, or none of the performance indicators provided in the guidelines. This could mean significant deviation from one school division to another, leaving Virginia unable to determine if an administrator is effective outside of a subjective evaluation (Virginia Department of Education, 2012).

These evaluation guidelines took effect throughout the Commonwealth of Virginia on July 1, 2013. Beginning in the 2013-2014 school year, each assistant principal was subject to a new division-wide assistant principal evaluation system. The cost of building the new evaluation system was different in each jurisdiction. However, each local educational agency had to expend some employment hours or hired additional personnel in the evaluation offices of the school division to develop the new evaluation procedures. In addition, time and resources were spent training the principals and the superintendents regarding the new performance evaluation system. This mandate has been unfunded by the federal and state governments (Virginia Code, §22.1-253).

Prior to the requirements of 2012, the assistant principal evaluation did not weight any one standard of performance evaluation differently from the others; each standard was equal. This fundamentally changed the evaluation process for both the teacher and the administrator (the teacher evaluation mirrors the administrator evaluation). The assistant principal evaluation standard regarding student achievement in Virginia requires that the assistant principal be able to identify evidence that students are meeting strategic, measurable, attainable, results-oriented, time-bound, and rigorous achievement goals, as well as ensuring teachers and administrators' student achievement goals are aligned with building-level goals for increased student academic progress (Virginia Department of Education, 2012). The vagueness of the standard could result in academic achievement goals that are not as rigorous as the intentions of the federal or state governments. The measurement of an assistant principal by the achievement of the teacher's goals could bring additional stress to the administrator-teacher relationship or the principal-assistant principal relationship. How the assistant principal's student achievement goal is set and how much influence others – including the principal – hold could have additional implications.

The passage of ESSA did not alter the way educational personnel in Virginia are evaluated. There is a continued reform focus on student academic progress. However, ESSA did change the way schools in Virginia are accredited, and as a result, there was a shift in focus on the definition of student academic progress. Under No Child Left Behind, as well as the waivers, there was a specific focus on eliminating the achievement gap in literacy and mathematics (P.L. 107-110). Beginning with the 2018-2019 school

year, the Virginia Department of Education changed the Standards of Accreditation to reflect the changes in the federal law. For a school in Virginia to earn accreditation, the school had to meet a newly defined set of school quality indicators, as defined by the Virginia Department of Education under the authority of Virginia Code §22.1-253.13:3.

As of the 2018-2019 school year, the standards of quality for school accreditation for all schools in Virginia include the following: overall proficiency and growth in English reading/writing achievement (including progress of English learners toward English language proficiency), overall proficiency and growth in mathematics, overall proficiency in science, English achievement gaps among student subgroups, mathematics achievement gaps among student subgroups, and absenteeism. For Virginia high school accreditation, there are also standards for the graduation index, dropout rate, and – to be implemented for the 2021-22 school year – college, career, and civic readiness (Virginia Department of Education, 2018).

The student subgroups of concern related to achievement gaps continue to focus heavily on students with disabilities and English language learners; additional student subgroups examined include Asian, black, Hispanic, economically disadvantaged, and military-connected students (Virginia Department of Education, 2018). The only change in student subgroups of concern from No Child Left Behind to the Every Student Succeeds Act is the addition of military-connected students. According to the Virginia Department of Education (2018), for a school to be above the achievement bar in overall English performance, 75% or more of students must demonstrate mastery (including 75% of all student subgroups listed above). For overall math, math student subgroups listed

above, and science proficiency, the rate of proficiency for each school must be 70%. To meet the indicator for absenteeism, 85% or more of students must be absent fewer than 10% of school days. A high school must also meet the requirement of a graduation index with 88% of students graduating with the four-year cohort, and a dropout index indicating that fewer than 6% of students have dropped out of the four-year cohort from the school. The indicators are scored on a three-tiered system (Virginia Department of Education, 2018).

Understanding Policy Development

Figure 2 describes the process for the development of student achievement goals in performance evaluations for educational personnel. The policy requiring student achievement goals was implemented from the top down. The federal and state levels of government had two branches involved in the development of policy around personnel evaluations. Beginning with the passage of the ARRA law at the federal level, the U.S. Department of Education was then required to develop regulations regarding implementation of the NCLB waivers. In addition, the waiver applications from each state had to be evaluated. That guidance was provided to state legislatures (one branch) and state Departments of Education (a second branch) at the state level to determine action regarding changes to the state legal code, as well as to the state regulations. Once those actions were completed, the state Department of Education was required to provide a waiver application to the U.S. Department of Education. Once the regulations were accepted by the U.S. Department of Education, the information was shared by the state Department of Education to the local educational agency (school boards). The school

boards were then tasked with creating implementation plans that adhered to the guidance from the state and federal governments. Formal personnel evaluation procedures were communicated with assistant principals and stakeholders, and implementation began.

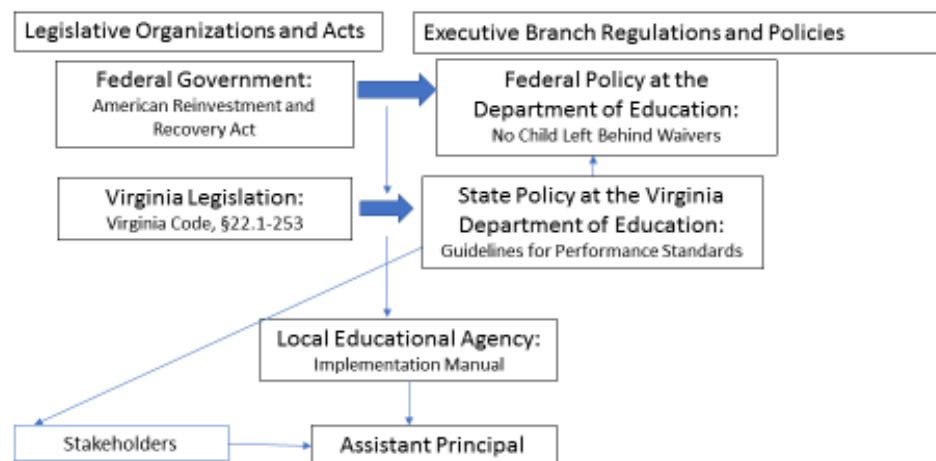


Figure 2. The process for developing student achievement goals in performance evaluations from the federal government to development at the assistant principal level.

Research Questions

Little is understood about the position of the assistant principalship, and current literature regarding education personnel evaluation focuses on teachers and principals. This study seeks to begin the conversation about assistant principal evaluation. To examine this topic – the purpose and influence of student achievement goals set by assistant principals in Virginia – this study will examine the following research questions:

1. How does the student achievement goal in the performance evaluation of the assistant principal connect to their job tasks and responsibilities?
 - a. What factors do assistant principals identify as influencing the development of the subject and measurement of the student achievement goal in their performance evaluations?
2. What demographic or geographic factors may help explain the focus of the student achievement goal in the performance evaluation of the assistant principal?

Significance

As the federal government has moved to make supervision and evaluation part of the reform dialogue, understanding assistant principals' perceptions regarding student achievement growth in the performance evaluation provides insights into what task responsibilities are delegated to the assistant principal and how the assistant principal will carry out their job duties (Lavigne & Chamberlain, 2017). In addition, the assistant principalship is often seen as a training ground for the principalship – albeit a poor one. Therefore, understanding how the assistant principal perceives the evaluation of their work allows for an understanding of how the performance evaluation can serve as a means of growth into the principalship (Hausman, Nebeker, McCreary, & Donaldson, 2002).

This study will also provide an understanding of what factors influence an assistant principal's choice of student achievement goal. This will provide insight into the assistant principal's relationship with the broader organization, understanding what support and direction the assistant principal is given in determining their performance

evaluation goal. How much autonomy an assistant principal has over setting their own student achievement goal indicates the type of relationship the assistant principal has with the principal. Many factors affect the work of an assistant principal and whether that work provides evidence for evaluation (Marshall & Hooley, 2006). Furthermore, since principals control assistant principals' work lives and future, how much input the principal provides in the assistant principal's student achievement goal would show a level of interest in developing the assistant principal beyond the current position (Marshall & Hooley, 2006).

As research indicates, school leadership is linked to student achievement (Lavigne & Chamberlain, 2017; Soehner & Ryan, 2011). The school leadership efforts in a vision of learning that flows from the principal to the entire school community provide a climate in which student achievement can grow (Soehner & Ryan, 2011). Most efforts of administration regarding student achievement are often channeled into ensuring that the right people are hired as teachers within the school (Lavigne & Chamberlain, 2017). This becomes key as the teacher can mitigate the efforts of the school administration (principal or assistant principal) to promoting student achievement (Lavigne & Chamberlain, 2017). Although the current literature addresses how teachers mitigate the efforts of the school administration, the literature does not address how the assistant principal might mitigate the principal's efforts.

This study may provide for assistant principal additional role clarity. Assistant principals often "experience role conflict and overload when it is not possible to perform adequately in all of their assigned roles. This situation is exacerbated when roles and

duties are ambiguous, never measured and never-ending” (Marshall & Hooley, 2006, p. 8). This role and duty ambiguity could be eased if the assistant principal had a firm direction in which to place energy, such as a student achievement goal.

Definition of Terms

Assistant principal: Frequently, this is the entry-level position for administrative careers in which the person focuses on issues of school management, student activities and services, community relations, personnel, and curriculum and instruction (Marshall & Hooley, 2006). The duties listed are assigned by the principal and subject to his or her discretion (Hausman et al., 2002; Marshall & Hooley, 2006). The position of assistant principal is sometimes referred to as vice principal or lead teacher. For the purposes of this study, I will be surveying only people who have the assistant principal title.

No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 was the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, the enabling legislation that provides the framework in which the U.S. Department of Education works with the varying state and local educational agencies (P.L. 107-110). At the time, NCLB was the largest funding source of elementary and secondary education (Lomax, 2011). This legislation required that states track school performance overall and then in subsequent subgroups for the purposes of informing schools, states, the federal government, and the public of school performance and success in closing the achievement gap (Lomax, 2011). For the purposes of this study, No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) is referred to as the law that brought about the measurements of subgroups and increased focus on accountability.

American Reinvestment and Recovery Act: This act provided a \$4.35 billion fund for the U.S. Department of Education to award to states based on the efforts of state governments to reform education (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). As part of these efforts, states were required to include student achievement goals in the performance evaluation of educational personnel (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). Included with this competition (Race to the Top) was relief from the requirement of the AYP measures of No Child Left Behind if the state government agreed to stipulated requirements regarding measuring student achievement. This fund is often called No Child Left Behind Waivers; this is how the policy is referred to in this study.

The student achievement goal: This is the seventh standard in the *Virginia Guidelines for Uniform Performance Standard and Evaluation Criteria for Principals*. “The principal’s leadership results in acceptable, measurable student academic progress based on established standards” (VA Department of Education, 2012, p.13). For purposes of the Virginia principal evaluation standards (which apply to the assistant principal), student progress must always be measured in academic progress (Strange, 2012). Strange (2012) uses research from Hallinger, Heck, Mazzeo, and Cotton to document the practices in which principals affect student achievement in largely indirect ways. For the purposes of this study, the student achievement goal will reflect the definition from the state regarding the use of acceptable, measurable student academic progress.

Chapter Two

In a response to the call for additional literature on the position of the assistant principal by Hooley and Marshall (2006), Hausman et al. (2002), and Shoho and Barnett (2010), this literature review seeks to understand the scholarly literature available regarding the position of the assistant principalship and professional evaluation. The research questions focus this study on how the assistant principal perceives the implementation of the student achievement goal in the performance evaluation as the goals relate to job tasks and responsibilities, as well as support and influence in choosing the goals. In conducting a review of the literature found in Education Research Complete, ERIC, and the Education Database, the research about the assistant principal is limited and focused on role, job functions, preparation, or the pipeline from the assistant principalship to the principalship (Hausman et al., 2002; Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Oleszewski, Shoho, & Barnett, 2012). The assistant principal is a key player in the leadership of a school, as they participate in the management of the school and increasingly in the instructional leadership of the school (Barnett, Shoho, & Oleszewski, 2012).

As principals are turning over at higher rates due to burnout (most do not see themselves in the principal position for more than 10 years) as well as the on-going natural attrition of a generation, there is an increased need to provide assistant principals

with ongoing support and development opportunities to develop the attitudes and competencies needed to be successful principals (Barnett et al., 2012). The student achievement goal in personnel evaluations provides an opportunity for the assistant principal to demonstrate accomplishments that would make him or her eligible for a promotion, if the student achievement goal is developed properly and the assistant principal's daily tasks relate to the work around the student achievement goal (Shoho & Barnett, 2010). Credible research about the assistant principalship is needed to prevent a leadership succession crisis to the principalship which will inhibit student achievement; the opposite of the reasoning to include student achievement in personnel evaluations (Shoho & Barnett, 2010). To provide a comprehensive review of the research literature regarding the assistant principal, the following topics are explored: influence of the principal, job roles and responsibilities of the assistant principal, assistant principal evaluation and the assistant principal to principal pipeline.

Influence of the Principal

Focus on the distributed leadership and accountability of the principal has led to the assistant principal not being researched as an individual position but as a function of the principalship (Huggins, Klar, Hammonds, & Buskey, 2017). Huggins et al. (2017) conducted a multisite, exploratory case study to examine the personal capacity to develop the leadership capacities of formal and informal leaders in their schools. The authors employed a single interview in which the multiple authors interviewed different principals using a semi-structured interview protocol. The researchers chose six principals from both the east and west coast to capture some geographic differences.

These principals were chosen using a purposeful sampling in which a multistage recruitment tool and snowball sampling.

Huggins et al. (2017) cite previous research to argue that as distributed leadership becomes the norm in schools, it is necessary to develop those individuals who will help the principal lead the school toward increased academic achievement. The findings indicate the biggest contributing personal characteristic of a principal to developing leaders is the commitment to the development of leaders. For principals who were committed to developing leadership capacity the second disposition was that they understood leadership development to be a process of continuous development and improvement. Mistakes would be made, and reflection would allow for growth. The principals in this study were also found to have a high tolerance for risk, making them good shepherds of young leaders, welcoming that ultimately the principal was responsible for what might go wrong as those who they were developing made mistakes (Huggins et al., 2017). In educational leadership there is a need for a high tolerance of risk so that educators can pursue new, meaningful ways to reach students and for those students to make progress in student achievement (Colwell, 2015).

In the discussion portion, Huggins et al. (2017) recognize that distributed leadership requires that principals are able and willing to take on all of the dispositions listed above, which may not be possible for all principals. The authors also recognize that there are limitations of the study, the sample size was too small to generalize. The implications for the authors was in the acknowledgement that developing others requires additional time and effort but that the payoff was worth the additional engagement. As a

matter of preparation, one implication is to focus more in preparation programs on how to develop leaders because the principals in this study indicated that their understanding of how to develop people was a result of their own on-the-job training. The authors also indicate that the focus or mindset of continuous improvement of other leadership positions must be a part of the principalship. In addition to the call from Huggins et al. (2017) , Hallinger and Heck (2009) call for further research in the principal leadership in capacity building – important as assistant principals set goals for the student achievement part of the personnel evaluation that they are building capacity to be able to fulfill the duties of leadership (Huggins et al., 2017).

Job Roles and Responsibilities of Assistant Principal

Barnett et al. (2012) conducted a study to examine the perceptions of a cross section of assistant principals regarding the realities of their jobs. The authors of this article conducted this study to fill the need for research on the assistant principal as this position continues to be in schools but undervalued in research (Barnett et al., 2012). The authors acknowledge a vast amount of the assistant principals' time is spent on managerial and disciplinary tasks, but also sees a push for instructional leadership roles to become part of the assistant principal tasks. This study is focused on the assistant principals of all levels (elementary, middle, and high) and in urban and suburban school districts in south central Texas and seeks to better understand role challenges and expectations and compare whether the realities of the job change over time with more experience in the role. Assistant principals are found to welcome the opportunities to be instructional leaders, especially considering the increased focus of student achievement

growth. Barnett et al. (2012) cite the increases instructional leadership requirements on principals as causing the professional development focus of principals to be teachers, not assistant principals causing concern over their development for better evaluations and student achievement. The authors acknowledge that improving student achievement cannot fall to only the principal thus requiring a deeper understanding of how the assistant principal functions in schools and ways to best provide reflective opportunities for their growth.

The authors of this study focus on their research questions using a public policy context of public schools (Barnett et al., 2012). As the increased pressure of accountability has prevailed to change the course of public policy around education policy, most notably student achievement in terms of test scores and dropout rates, the focus on the work of the assistant principal becomes necessary. Barnett et al. (2012) focus on the “challenges of the role, what the assistant principals are prepared and unprepared to do and the qualities needed to be successful” (p.98). The authors used a semi structured interview protocol and separated the respondents into novice and experienced assistant principals. A total of 103 assistant principals responded. Ten graduate students and two professors conducted the interviews over three years. Professors trained the graduate students to increase the conformity to the instrument. The data analysis was conducted by two professors using the constant comparative method.

Barnett et al. (2012) caution that the limits of this survey include not being generalizable to the rest of assistant principals or even others in the state of Texas as job requirements will vary. In addition, although there are comparisons made between

novice and experienced assistant principals, they are not assistant principals who were followed longitudinally. In their findings, the major challenges reported by all assistant principals were workload and task management, student issues, parent issues, teacher and staff issues. Student, parent, and teacher issues were ripe with conflict that assistant principals felt challenged to address. Low on this list were curriculum and instruction issues, personal or external expectations. Assistant principals felt adequately prepared to work with people, understand expectations and have skills to perform the job. Many respondents felt prepared to work with teachers in observations, evaluations, and professional development. In determining characteristics for success, there were differences between novice and experienced assistant principals. The highest rated for both was emotional intelligence. Attentive to students' needs, attentive to adult needs and professional networking were low for both, all were at 0% for novice assistant principals.

For Barnett et al., the biggest implications of this study were in leadership preparation, the lack of focus on the assistant principalship (almost always a focus on the principalship) in these programs makes it difficult for people to be prepared for the position. The article focuses on how the assistant principalship is different in its obligations, challenges and tasks from the principalship, thus making an argument for how evaluations might be different. Among these focuses for the preparation programs must be improving instructional leadership capacities, as assistant principals are now measured on student achievement, the focus of this part of the evaluation will be on instructional leadership.

The core for understanding the assistant principal is to understand the role and job expectation of those who are in the role, as well as the principals, who in most schools have discretion over the work of the assistant principal. Once understanding is gained on this central issue, through direct research of the assistant principals regarding their daily activities, research can then move to the crux of my questions which revolve around how the student achievement goal of the performance is connecting to the tasks and responsibilities of an assistant principal. At this time, there is no objectiveness regarding the position of the assistant principalship in terms of what the responsibilities are of the assistant principal and how they should be prepared or evaluated (Oleszewski et al., 2012).

Oleszewski et al. (2012) assert that many state governments, at the requirement of the federal government have moved to a uniform evaluation which requires that 40 percentage points of the evaluation be dedicated to the increased student achievement of the students in the school despite evidence that the assistant principal may have no direct control over the activities that increase student achievement. They contend that in addition to evaluation, understanding of the assistant principal role will also help to conduct research on how to prepare candidates for the role of the assistant principal and the best job description to attract and choose quality candidates for the position who in some cases will eventually become principals (Oleszewski et al., 2012). According to Oleszewski et al. (2012), there is no consensus on the role expectations of the assistant principal. Although there are similar groupings of tasks that the assistant principal does,

none of them set forth direct implications for student achievement – a category worth 40% of the evaluation of an assistant principal (Barnett et al., 2012).

Drawing on findings from this study, the understanding of the role and job expectation of the assistant principal will also allow for additional study regarding the professional development of the assistant principal. Research in this literature review reveals the struggles of the new principals upon arrival from the assistant principal role. The struggle reveals that the activities of the assistant principal and the principal are different. There is also evidence that there is a need for different professional development for career assistant principals and assistant principal who aspire to be a principal (Barnett et al., 2012). These differences may result in research opportunities to provide support for different evaluation instruments for the assistant principal and the principal and furthermore the career assistant principal and the aspiring assistant principal.

The study of the assistant principal is important because the person in this position “directly impacts the school’s academic capacity and indirectly influences student growth” (Oleszewski et al., 2012, p. 264). To understand the other aspects of the assistant principal such as preparation, evaluation, and professional development, an understanding of the essential role of the assistant principal must be gained. A 1994 literature review study conducted by Harvey indicated changes to the assistant principal position. His study revealed that the assistant principal position has evolved to include instructional leadership, administrative routines (bus duty, cafeteria duty), custodian management, clerical management, and managing student behavior, but through

increased accountability standards, there has been a focus on the instructional leadership, change management, and professional development. The position contains little discretionary power, the assistant principal is left to what the principal assigns as job tasks and responsibilities (Harvey, 1994).

Of note in Harvey's study is a shift in the framework under which the assistant principal is researched. Prior to the early 2000s the assistant principal had been shown from the managerialist framework, which gave just a one-dimensional view of the management or administrative tasks of the assistant principal, largely focused on custodians and discipline (Marshall & Hooley 2006). However, as schools have moved to more self-management enterprises, this becomes too simplistic of a view. In addition, Harvey looked from an organization point of view and found that there is more of a cultural perspective, as schools have become more communal in approaching the work of education. Organizational theory frameworks provide an interesting look at power, authority and resource allocation. Through the managerialist view of the early studies of the assistant principal, the assistant principal can be approached from the framework of corporate federalism "to describe the process whereby the government has reframed education as component of the microeconomic reform agenda" (Harvey 1994, p. 18).

In essence, by creating education policies, the federal government is controlling the work of schools while forcing the schools to have a network of self-management approach to implement the new reforms. To look at the assistant principal through the school level implementation of the reforms regarding how they contribute and to use it to critique the policy allows for a fuller perspective of the assistant principal – this will

allow for greater research on the role expectation of the assistant principal in view of the federal policy that requires states to include student achievement data in evaluation.

In 2002, Hausman et al. conducted a study on the work life of the assistant principal through a survey instrument. Although the authors warn of the lack of generalizability due to the sample, it did reveal information about how the assistant principal completes tasks throughout the day. The authors put the 41 activities of the assistant principal into seven categories – instructional leadership, personnel management, interactions with the education hierarchy, professional development, resource management, public relations, and student management. As part of the survey, they used a Likert scale to describe their work life in five categories. These five categories are: professional commitment, community support, sense of efficacy, goal congruence, and balance between professional and personal lives.

According to their findings, how assistant principals spend their time is not surprising. Most time during the day of an assistant principal is spent on student management, education hierarchy, and personnel management (Hausman et al., 2002). The activities with the least amount of time are instructional management and resource management. The assistant principals also spend less time with outside relationships such as public relations and interacting with non-educators and the external community. The tasks that assistant principals spend the least amount of time on are the ones that would best prepare them for the principalship. In additional results, the assistant principals who spent greater than 10 years teaching felt more success and spent more time engaged in instructional leadership than other assistant principals with fewer years

teaching. These authors contend that for preparing applicants to become solid instructional leaders, their research suggests that it is better to wait until an applicant has been in the classroom longer. On the other hand, they suggest additional time as an administrator does not make assistant principals more successful with instructional leadership. The authors provided evidence that assistant principals spend less time on instructional leadership but are now more responsible for student achievement through their evaluation provides opposing viewpoints (Hausman et al., 2002).

Marshall and Hooley (2006) identified four categories in which assistant principals work. These four categories include: holding conferences with parents and students, planning for improvement or response to crisis, they handle behavior problems (consistent with other researchers), master schedules and rosters (this seems to vary by study), and counseling students on future plans (another task that seems to vary by study). Marshall and Hooley (2006) found that in the movement toward greater accountability assistant principals are now being tasked by principals to monitor teacher observation and evaluation. They have identified this as a possible area for professional development for assistant principals as they have often identified this as an area of struggle upon assuming the role.

Oleszewski et al. (2012) concluded that the role of the assistant principal must be better defined and that it should not be as flexible and not change from year to year and that it should mirror more of a leadership team with clear distributed leadership. This objectiveness of the position of the assistant principalship is not yet clear and as a result the preparation, selection, evaluation and principal pipeline would be in question. The

conclusions of Oleszewski et al. (2012) also site the flaws and missing research in the area of training and professional development. Many principal preparation programs focus on the principalship although in most cases, to become the principal a candidate must first become an assistant principal. The authors also call for greater research and analysis on the roles of the assistant principal due to the changes in the position with the added federal regulations – NCLB. Furthermore, seeking an answer to the question - does this make them prepared for their future position as principal (Oleszewski et al., 2012).

In another study by the same three authors (Barnett et al., 2012), the findings included major challenges for both experienced and novice assistant principals were the same: 1. workload and task management, 2. student issues, 3. parent issues, 4. teacher and staff issues, 5. curriculum and instruction issues, 6. personal expectations and 7. external expectations. For more experienced assistant principals, the challenge of teachers who resisted change arose. However, for the most part the challenges between experienced and novice assistant principals are the same.

The assistant principals felt that they were best prepared to work with people, understand the expectations of the role and possess important skills. However, as the role is ill-defined, the role expectations from one position to the next may vary. In addition, some of these confidences arise from participants who indicate that they have gained these skills from prior experiences. The respondents felt least prepared to deal with people when conflicts arise as well as scheduling, teacher evaluation, extracurricular activities, special education, assessment and data analysis. The experienced assistant

principals felt better prepared to deal with instructional leadership but only marginally (Barnett et al., 2012).

Barnett et al. (2012) indicate that personal qualities for an assistant principal were emotional intelligence, flexibility, and positive reactions to other people. Professional qualities were leadership skills, followed by communication and relationship development. However, in subsequent questions of their study there seemed to be mentions of professional skills like conducting data analysis being necessary for job success. Experienced assistant principals were more attentive to the needs of student and adults and creating professional networks, but these skills were almost as common in the novice assistant principals. Data analysis skills would seem to be essential for measuring student achievement.

The study of Barnett et al. in 2012 indicates a greater need to study the assistant principal because principal turnover has become an increasing problem. The added pressures of superintendent turnover due to the demands of increasing student achievement requires that the superintendent turn to school leadership (principal and assistant principal) to increase student achievement which results in additional stress that causes principals to leave their positions (Colwell, 2015). Research demonstrates that when a principal departs, teachers tend to leave and when teachers and principals leave student achievement drops. If principals are leaving more, then “providing assistant principals with ongoing support and development opportunities can have enormous benefits, especially as a way of developing the attitudes and competencies needed to be

successful principals” (Barnett et al., 2012, p. 122). This is necessary if assistant principals are measured by student achievement growth.

Suggestions by Barnett et al. (2012) include mentoring programs with good principal mentors and assembling material focused on effective teaching and assessment practices and work with teachers to use this information. Assistant principals need to visit classrooms in an efficient manner. Also, they can do outside benchmarking by networking with assistant principals and observing principals outside of the building in which they work. Ultimately, increasing student achievement needs to be a team effort – not just on the principal but to also include the assistant principal and the teacher (Oleszewski et al., 2012).

Assistant Principal Evaluation. The historical connection between the occupation of teacher and principal is deep; however, it is also often fragmented. In her book, Rousmaniere (1997) aligns the historical requirements of the principal to the teacher as: maintaining the viewpoint of all the stakeholders, being current on pedagogical innovations, social and health needs of the faculty, educational psychology, and knowing educational trends. The job of the assistant principal would be to aid the principal to achieve these objectives. In Rousmaniere’s book the assistant principal is viewed as an extension of the principal with respect to these requirements. For the Virginia 2012 Personnel Evaluation standards, this provides evidence for both Instructional Leadership and Human Resources Management. This does not present a lens on student achievement in the form of accountability. As the role of the principal and assistant principal was codified in Virginia through evaluation systems some of the

requirements of the principal have continued while others have changed and morphed into different requirements. A review of the new principal evaluation system (and assistant principal evaluation system because they are the same) in Virginia and the immediate past principal evaluation system demonstrate this reality. Specifically, the six additional areas of principal evaluations have an effect (albeit indirect) on student achievement. Most prominent among these areas is school culture. It is the building of school culture (and trust) that allows relationships among the adults to flourish having an impact on student achievement (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005). If teachers and assistant principals do not have an environment in which they trust the other adults in the building and experience successful work, then they will leave thus causing a decrease in student achievement (Burkhauser, Gates, Hamilton, Li, & Pierson, 2013).

In establishing the new evaluation criteria for assistant principals in Virginia, the research rationale relies heavily on the 2005 research of Marzano et al. This work was a book meant to provide a research synthesis to education practitioners. As part of the book, Marzano et al. used a research synthesis of previously conducted studies to determine that building a school culture and trust allows students to feel safe to learn and grow thus increasing student achievement. As part of a RAND report, Burkhauser et al. (2013) found a less direct set of circumstances in which school leadership influences student achievement. The authors of this study cite that school context is the biggest influence of what a principal must do help students achieve at higher levels, and therefore, the principal candidate must be considered as to how his or her strengths fit within that context (p. 2)

School Culture is identified as an area of evaluation in the new principal and assistant principal evaluation system set forth by the Commonwealth of Virginia. “The principal fosters the success of all students by developing, advocating, and sustaining an academically rigorous, positive, and safe school climate for all stakeholders” (Virginia Board of Education, 2012). Included in the ideas under this area are collaboratively promoting high expectations, displaying empathy for all stakeholders, addressing barriers to teacher and staff performance, providing positive working conditions, safety in schools, behavior management, is approachable, positive and inviting. Teachers seek an administration that is inviting and collaborative. School climate is defined by Hoy, Tarter, & Kottkamp as “the relatively enduring quality of the school environment that is experienced by participants, affects their behavior and is based on their collective perception about behavior in schools” (1991).

Promoting a positive school climate is linked to higher student achievement (Bukhauser, Gates, Hamilton, Li, & Pearson 2013). Thus, if a large portion of a principal evaluation is based on student achievement this is one area that should be of focus for success. One way to bring school climate into a positive light is in bringing the parents and teachers together to discuss academic achievement (Marzano et al., 2005). In discussing issues of concern and celebrating achievements the principal or assistant principal brings to light the discussion and new ideas that can continue to drive improvement. Bukhauser et al. also indicate that the “right” level of autonomy will vary by district, school or principal but the availability of a superior for mentoring and reflecting is important (2013).

As curriculum teams became prominent in school buildings, the principal and assistant principal must be aware of the group dynamics and the costs and benefits to the school culture based on the successes and failures (Heck & Marcoulides, 1996). Including teachers in human resource decisions allows for great success when working in teams, thus promoting greater school culture (Hallinger, Bickman, & Davis, 1996). The more teachers feel engaged the more school improvement can take place. This also puts into place the idea of additional vertical articulation, not between grade levels, but between levels of management. Increasing the effectiveness of principals also requires strong mentoring of the position and the open-door, approachability of the superintendent above the principal (Bukhauser, Gates, Hamilton, Li, & Pearson, 2013).

In their book, Bryk and Schneider (2002) present a literature review which surmises that principals must also engage the community to build trust. Furthermore, presenting that student achievement improvement can only occur when constructive criticism can be acted upon and that this occurs when the person receiving the criticism trusts the person who is providing it. Trusts also opens people to new ideas and avoids isolation (Bryk & Schneider, 2002). Isolation of the school or its principal from its community can cause lasting damage to student achievement (Bryk & Schneider, 2002). There are many aspects of a student's life that the school can help with – however, not if the parent or student does not trust the school to seek the help schools can provide.

Raising the achievement of students is the primary focus of school administrators and School Improvement Plans throughout the nation. In addition, the focus has also included guaranteeing that an effective principal (who shows results through student

achievement gains) is at the helm of every school throughout the United States. As there has been a focus for increased awareness of the way student achievement is measured, there has been an increased focus on school performance and employee performance.

As noted by the research above, the principal has substantial indirect influence on student academic progress through teaching quality and student learning (Mazzeo, 2003). In his issue brief, Mazzeo cites school leadership has being important to the improvement of student academic achievement. As the number of administrative openings continues to grow, especially in high-poverty, low-performing schools, the focus on preparing principals to have a positive impact on student achievement is necessary. More importantly, Mazzeo poses that 29% of superintendents believe the quality of principals is declining and that the job is changing from primarily managerial and political to instructional leadership focused on teaching and learning (2003). The needs cited by Mazzeo would indicate that how assistant principals are chosen and trained for the principalship would need to be examined for potential policy changes. In addition, Cotton (2007) and Hallinger and Heck (2010) note that if teachers are given authority in the classroom, they will organize, manage and provide instructional materials that focus on student achievement.

In Hallinger and Heck's 2010 research, they addressed the impact of collaborative leadership on school improvement. This study was a longitudinal study of 192 elementary schools in one state. Hallinger and Heck conducted surveys with the teachers and administrators regarding the distributive leadership while monitoring student improvement via data from 12,480 students. The students were observed over a three-

year period. Background variables were included in this method. First, Hallinger and Heck found that the model that they used was effective at describing how collaborative leadership impacts the improvement over time.

The findings of Hallinger and Heck's 2010 research indicate that collaborative leadership would be indirectly associated with initial student learning levels, specifically on reading outcomes. The second finding examined whether the change in leadership over time would have a positive effect on school capacity and subsequently student growth. The authors did find that there was a positive change in reading scores during this time, however, they also cautioned that the lack of a measure of classroom teaching represents a limit to explaining these findings (Hallinger & Heck, 2010).

Using inductive reasoning in their study, Robinson, Lloyd, and Rowe (2008) set out six areas that are supported as influencing student achievement. Principals must set, communicate and monitor learning goals, provide strategic resources (ever important in poor economic times), direct involvement in supporting and evaluating teachers, oversight of curriculum through schoolwide coordination, directly participates with teachers in professional learning and protecting time for teachers by reducing workload where possible. The management of the building to keep "the trains running on time" so that the teachers can provide high quality instruction is key to student achievement. In short, although effective school leadership can have an effective size of .25 – one standard deviation of improvement, it is not through a direct means but indirect actions (Robinson et al., 2008). All of the standards listed in Robinson et al. (2008) can be accounted for in other standards of the personnel evaluation including Standard 7:

Student Achievement, except if the local educational agency is providing direct evidence through assessment, at which point an assistant principal is being evaluated with data over which he or she has no direct control.

As part of the waiver for the requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act, Virginia was required to include student achievement in the performance evaluation of all educational personnel. To comply with the requirements of the waiver, Virginia passed a law and subsequent regulations that allowed for student achievement results to be calculated at 40% of assistant principal performance evaluations. To justify this inclusion, the Commonwealth of Virginia used a meta-analysis conducted by Waters, Marzano, and McNulty (2003), which reported that there is a significant impact of educational leaders on the achievement of the students under their care. However, criticisms abound regarding this study. Robinson et al. (2008) take exception to the choice of the 70 studies at the heart of the Waters et al. (2003) study because of the 70 studies included in the metanalysis, 60 of the studies were not peer reviewed. In addition, the study includes both direct and indirect effects of leadership which allows the results to be skewed to find a relationship.

Robinson et al. (2008) conducted their own meta-analysis, the systematic research of studies for their meta-analysis found only 27 peer reviewed studies to base the sample size on which to conduct a meta-analysis, in contrast to the 70 studies used by Marzano et al. that included many studies that were not peer reviewed. In conducting the study, the authors found that instructional leadership was more effective than transformational leadership. The leadership dimensions with the highest effect size on student

achievement was “promoting and participating in teacher learning and development” (ES = .84) which is a large effect size (pg. 656). In the areas of “establishing goals and expectations and planning, coordinating and evaluating teaching and the curriculum: the ES = .42 for each category (pg. 656). The “strategic resourcing” of administration has an ES = .31 making it a moderate effect – to include aligning resources with goals – so in a sense without goals, this category cannot influence student outcomes (pg. 656). The final category “ensuring an orderly and supportive environment” has an ES = .27 (pg. 656). This allows for teacher to do their jobs without external pressures. This research provides evidence for ways that the assistant principal evaluation should be weighted in the categories other than student achievement (Robinson et al., 2008).

Through this study, the authors quantify the actions of the assistant principal or principal that have an indirect effect on student achievement. For example, promoting and participating in teacher learning and development – is defined as “leadership that not only promotes by directly participates with teachers in formal or informal professional learning” (Robinson et al., 2008, p. 656). A principal can sit next to a teacher and learn a new method of instruction and it certainly sets a great example; however, it is up to the teacher to determine whether to incorporate that strategy in a classroom. That is a mitigating factor, since an assistant principal cannot be in every classroom at every moment to be certain the strategy is being used, then the teacher’s decision does not allow for a direct impact. An example can be provided for each of the additional leadership dimensions. So, this still leaves open the research question regarding what the

assistant principal does daily that has a direct effect on the performance of student achievement.

Robinson et al. (2008) also address a study by Wirziers, Bosker, and Kruger (2003) that seeks to answer the question “To what extent does educational leadership *directly* affect student achievement?” (p. 400). Robinson et al. were not impressed with the size of the effect of the actions of the leadership on student achievement (2008). Wirziers et al. (2003) also used a meta-analysis using peer reviewed multinational research papers from 1986-1996. The results of the Wirziers et al. 2003 meta-analysis suggest that there is a positive effect of educational leadership on student achievement; however, it is very small, $Zr = .02$ for the total sample. The results of the meta-analysis indicate that there are four behaviors that have a positive relationship: supervision and evaluation ($Zr = .02$), monitoring ($Zr = .07$), visibility ($Zr = .07$) and defining and communicating mission ($Zr = .19$). However, this is not very robust when the outliers are removed from the study. This indicates that the single biggest thing a principal can do is to state a clear mission and expectations. There was a negative relationship discovered through this study – when administrators conduct activities aimed solely at raising student achievement – it will not raise student achievement (Wirziers et al., 2003). This is direct opposition to the mandates of the policies that the United States Education System is under. If a school fails to make benchmarks, the state government can proceed with a school takeover complete with administration brought in for the expressed purpose of raising student achievement. However, based on the research of Robinson et al. (2008) and Wirziers et al. (2003), this would not be an effective way to raise student

achievement. In addition, the results indicate that there is lower effect in secondary schools than in primary schools and that there is some moderating effect regarding student demographic information (Wirziers et al., 2003).

The construction of the Wirziers et al. study (2003) is better because it relies on substantially more peer reviewed studies than the Marzano et al. study (2005). Although the 2003 study by Wirziers et al. is better constructed than the Marzano et al. study (2005) that the Commonwealth of Virginia used to justify the inclusion of student achievement in the assistant principal evaluation, it shows a far less effect on student achievement than the Marzano et al. study indicates. The Marzano et al. sample and methods are less particular regarding sample (almost exclusively non-peer reviewed), and the methods are less robust in the conducting of the meta-analysis. The Commonwealth through Dr. Stronge only uses the Marzano et al. study and might have benefited from the Wirziers et al. study. However, this may have led to questions regarding the proportionality of the 40% of the evaluation being weighted on student achievement. In determining how assistant principals should be evaluated, the findings that the assistant principals with more than six years of experience as an assistant principal in the same school spend more time on personnel management, public relations, and resource management than newer assistant principals. This makes these assistant principals more qualified to be promoted, however this group is less likely to get promoted. These findings indicate that perhaps different assistant principals need different types of evaluations (Hausman et al., 2002).

Additional evidence regarding the small indirect contribution of assistant principals toward the goals of student achievement has been made in Hallinger's 2005 study. Hallinger reports that the evidence indicates that school principals contribute to school effectiveness and student achievement indirectly through actions they take to influence school and classroom conditions and that the effects on student achievement are small (2005). Hallinger (2005) reports that policymakers are heavily focused on the selection and training of school leaders to produce a large-scale change but that in order to have meaningful change, the treatment would have to be stronger to achieve the desired outcome.

Robinson et al. (2008) contend that the most impact a principal has is through the mission of the school and being certain that everyone knows it and is modeling their work around the statement. The quality of school outcomes can be influenced by the alignment of school structures and the culture alignment with the mission (Hallinger, 2005). It is important for an assistant principal who wants to be a principal to understand how to communicate a clear mission and to align the resources of the building through finances and staffing to provide for the achievement of that mission because of increased public scrutiny it has become a requirement that the mission be focused on student achievement (Hallinger, 2005). This not currently part of the routine duties of the assistant principal per the research, although it is a common feature in leadership preparation programs (Oleszewski et al., 2012). It would also need to be evaluated to determine if the assistant principal was successful as this would be a difference in the

evaluation between career assistant principals and aspiring assistant principals (Oleszewski et al., 2012).

Due to the increased focus on creating conditions that foster the use of more powerful methods of teaching and learning in schools, the principal is also now in focus as someone who can force that change. However, the day to day tasks of the principal are also mired in a regulatory and bureaucratic organization that seeks to predetermine every move. In addition, through the literature review in his 2005 research, Hallinger cites Roland Barth to indicate that no one person could possibly fill the role by themselves – that in fact a team is needed – one that the assistant principal would be a fundamental member to help deliver the environment where better school outcomes are possible (2005). This makes the study of the assistant principal necessary.

Identifying the proper protocols to evaluate the assistant principal is necessary because “people who have ambiguous positions, who are evaluated by vague or inappropriate criteria, are very dependent on others’ judgment” (Marshall & Hooley 2006). This could mean that very good assistant principals are not being correctly evaluated because the tasks that they have been given by the principal do not match the job description or evaluation or that there is personal friction that is causing unprofessional behavior. Either way, the wrong candidate could be placed in the pipeline to become a principal for inadequate reasons.

In the 2009 New Teacher Project, findings indicated that teachers and administrators believe that more teachers in their school are ineffective (Weisberg, Sexton, Mulhern, & Keeling, 2009). According to the 2009 study, 81% of administrators

and 57% of teachers acknowledge that they can find at least one teacher in their building who is ineffective, even though less than 1% of teachers are rated as such. This highlights the discrepancy between formal evaluation and perception. In addition, the practice contributes to the overwhelming continuation of the “Widget Effect” or the assumption that classroom effectiveness is the same from teacher to teacher. Combining this research with the research on how teacher effectiveness affects student achievement, the No Child Left Behind Waivers as part of the Race to the Top competition required the inclusion of student achievement in all educator evaluations.

In their 2017 article, Kraft and Gilmour analyze survey data from a large urban school district demonstrating that evaluators perceive more than three times as many teachers are below proficient than are evaluated as such. As the addition of the student achievement measures were placed into teacher evaluations, little evidence was found by Kraft and Gilmour that change is evidenced in the distribution of teacher performance ratings. “Policymakers assumed that the sweeping changes to evaluation system design features would result in greater differentiation, overlooking Lipsky’s (2010) seminal observation that policies are ultimately made by “street-level bureaucrats” who implement them” (Kraft & Gilmour, 2017, pg. 236). Kraft and Gilmour’s (2017) findings suggest that the percentage of teachers rated as unsatisfactory has not changed.

Assistant Principal to Principal. The use of the assistant principal position to prepare candidates for the position of principal would be key to obtaining a better pool of candidates in an era where principals are not continuing in the position for as long and most principals do not see themselves in the position in 10 years (Shoho & Barnett,

2010). Furthermore, only 26.2% of assistant principals will go on to become principals and so it becomes evident that different assistant principals will require different types of evaluation to continue in the profession (Harvey, 1994). In studying the principalship, Hallinger (2005) found that there are three dimensions for the instructional leadership role of the principal – defining the school’s mission, managing the instructional program and promotion of a positive school learning climate. These are tasks that the assistant principals have felt uneasy performing due to a lack of experience, however, exposure to these tasks would increase the satisfaction of assistant principal (Cranston, Tromans, & Reugebrink, 2004). This finding presents an opportunity for both professional development and evaluation. These are smaller parts of the evaluation protocol which the assistant principal does not report doing much to contribute (Oleszewski et al., 2012).

Research conducted by Shoho and Barnett (2010) determined that for principal readiness, the principals were best prepared for communication with staff and personnel, curriculum, and daily operations. The principals were least prepared for communication with outside stakeholders, conflict resolutions, special curriculum, daily operations and budget. This means that the position of the principal is different from the position of assistant principal. In addition, this provides evidence that the principal and assistant principal positions are different and should not be provided the same evaluation documentation as is required under the regulation of the Virginia Department of Education. Furthermore, if developing an aspiring assistant principal, the evaluation of the career assistant principal as opposed to an aspiring assistant principal may need to be different as well.

To help bolster student achievement, it is in the best interests of schools to keep principals in place. When principals stay so do teachers and that helps benefit student achievement (Shoho & Barnett, 2010). However, principals in this study wanted to do a variety of other tasks other than continue to be principal, some wanted to go to central office, some wanted out of education, some wanted to become a principal of a different school, others wanted to be a superintendent and others wanted to become college professors, very few were interested in being a legacy principal. As such, their professional goals influenced how they viewed the principal at the beginning of their principalships (Shoho & Barnett, 2010).

The inclusion of student achievement data and the weight of 40% of the evaluation arises from a *Students First* article that included a study funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. This study provided evidence that including student achievement in evaluations at a rate of between 35% and 50% would cause educational personnel to pay closer attention to the achievement gap (Gates Foundation, 2013). In 2011, Hanushek argued that because there was wide acceptance that the most important aspect of a student's education was the teacher in the front of the classroom and that weaker student achievement resulted in slower economic growth. The extension for the *Students First* article was that if student achievement is also the focus of the assistant principal and principal evaluations; their focus will also be on student achievement and that will enhance the economic potential of all students.

Theoretical Framework

The legislative and executive history of the student achievement goal requirement in school personnel evaluations, including the flexibility given to school systems and local personnel, the implementation of this aspect of performance evaluations should be examined. To develop research questions regarding the implementation of student achievement goals in assistant principal evaluations, the theoretical frameworks of sensemaking and co-construction provide a lens that allows for the multiple layers of simultaneous policy development while focusing on the practice of the assistant principal in the implementation of the policy (Mehan, Hubbard, & Datnow, 2010).

For Weick, Sutcliffe, and Obstfeld (2005), “sensemaking involves turning circumstances into a situation that is comprehended explicitly in words and that serves as a springboard into action” (pg. 409). Using the policy mandate to require assistant principals to use student achievement data in their evaluations, the state provided the circumstances and the springboard into action. The sense-making process is particularly heightened where there are time of change in critical functions of a school, such as educational personnel evaluations and as such it will be critical to study how the assistant principals determine how to implement the student achievement goal in their performance evaluation (Ingle et al., 2011). The comprehension of the words in the policy was left to the assistant principals in how to implement the goal for the best use for the school or themselves. The assistant principals and stakeholders helping the assistant principals to implement the evaluation system will use cognitive frameworks based on their experiences, local context and social interactions within their sphere of influence

(Donaldson & Mavrogordato, 2018). Through this sense making process stakeholders will respond accordingly with actions that fit within their logics (Coburn, 2006). As part of the second research question, how assistant principal choose their goals becomes key to whether it is what is in the best interest of the school or what is in the best interest of the assistant principal.

Co-construction and sense-making as theoretical frameworks for study allow for a more “nuanced analysis and findings than the technical rational models” (Mehan et al., 2010). In using co-construction and sense-making this study can acknowledge the layers around education policy such as federal, state, and local governments and agencies as well as the individual actors within the organizations. The policy formed was created by all three levels of government across two branches of government at each level. The policy is then subject construction at the local level by the assistant principal in cooperation with the principal causing a level of social construction. Co-construction allows the examination of a single layer, in this study the assistant principal. Sense-making and co-construction allows for the acknowledgment of real-life implementation – “perspective recognizes that agents at all levels contribute to the policy-making process and that process is characterized by continual interaction among agents” (Mehan et al., 2010). The importance of local context in co-construction and sense-making allow for a multi-layer approach that acknowledges the intergovernmental relationships - why the rules around the evaluation process changed. This study can also acknowledge that the reason for the implementation at the local level is that the failure to comply results in the withdrawal of federal and state education funding.

Using co-construction with sense-making allows for “construction at the local level.” The frameworks place implementers at the forefront of the reform efforts, highlighting the process by which they interpret, adapt or transform policy” (Sykes et al., 2009). Using sense-making with co-construction allows for the theory that the “main contribution has been to explicate in detail how local actors interpret and enact policy” (Sykes et al., 2009). The assistant principal is central because “it is the primary site where meanings materials that inform and constrain identity and action” (Weich, Sutcliff, & Obstfeld, 2005). In the case of the assistant principal evaluation, the assistant principal is allowed agency in creating the goal to measure impact on student achievement goal. In addition, the second research question also will also provide insight into if anyone helps the assistant principal set the goal. When the federal, state and local governments allowed for the assistant principal to choose an individual goal, it created a situation in which the government was not the only entity acting on the policy. Each assistant principal is in a set of circumstances, political by the nature of schools (Spillane, Diamond, Burch, Hallett, Jita, & Zoltners, 2002). For the implementation of a student achievement goal to be successful, assistant principals must set goals that can be supported by the principal and faculty which immediately means can be supported by the local community.

The use of co-construction/sense-making also allows a look at the intergovernmental relationship – in this case, how the federal, state and local educational agency provide guidance regarding the use of student achievement data. Each local educational agency must then interpret that guidance and adopt the rules regarding how

to implement the evaluation changes. The state created guidance in the policies that allowed for this variation – but left the overall goal of positive effect on student achievement present (Virginia Department of Education, 2012). On the return loop, assistant principals are evaluated by a supervisor who reports progress on those goals through the evaluation. Evaluations from the local educational agency are shared with the state educational agency who reports growth in academic achievement both to the public (stakeholders) and the federal educational agency (USDOE).

The sense-making component of this framework allows for construction of view of how the assistant principals implement the student achievement data goal based on their actions in their role. It allows assistant principals to rationalize the work they are doing (Weick et al., 2005). Given how they are choosing their own goal, are they reflecting on how they are doing to their work for purposes of implementing a goal that already fits within the work they do or are they being innovative about their work to improve student achievement? How they choose their goal is directly influenced by the influence they have over their work.

In further examining the education policy around inclusion of student achievement data in evaluations, the studies that are available focus on either the teacher or the principal evaluation. Although the assistant principal position is found in most school locations, little is focused on how these people implement their evaluations. In fact, despite having different roles in a school building, the state has set only one set of guidelines for evaluating both the principal and the assistant principal (Barnett et al., 2012). In addition, the literature regarding the assistant principal separately addresses

evaluation as a matter of role expectation, for purposes of professional development, or power dynamics, but not the view of the assistant principal on the implementation of the evaluation policy (Barnett et al., 2012). In seeking to study the assistant principal's perspective on the evaluation policy, the use of co-construction/sense-making provides a lens to the multi-directional aspects of the evaluation policy as well as using the policy formation and implantation as one process that can be justified by observing the timeline from policy development to implementation (Sykes et al., 2009).

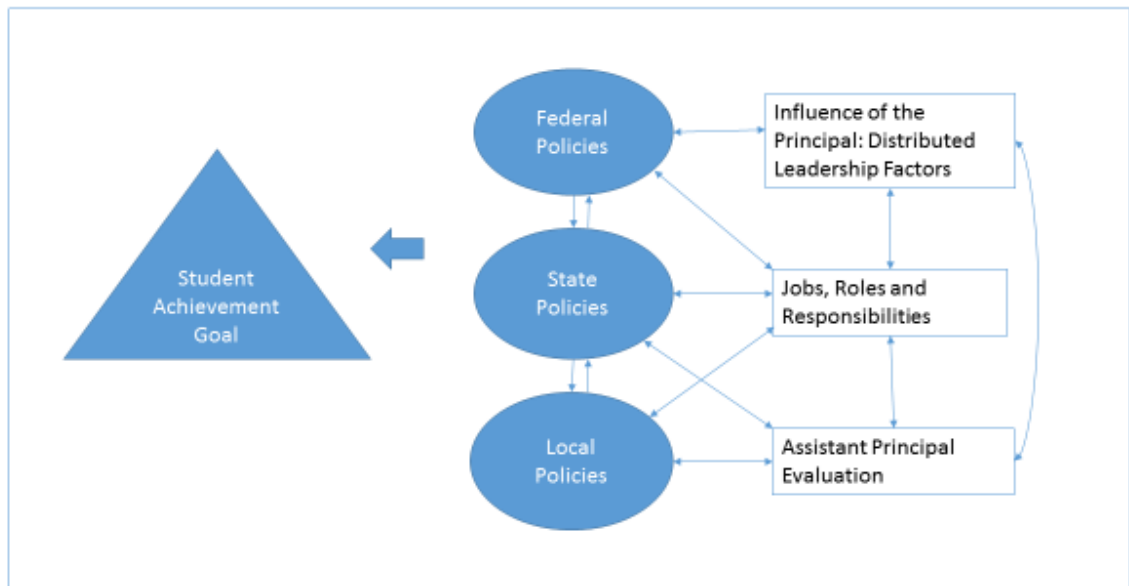


Figure 3. Theoretical framework.

The figure above depicts a theoretical framework in which the federal policies are pushed down to the state policies which has direct action over the local government process. The results of those processes and the requests to be relieved or receive approval for those processes is fed back up through the different levels of government. As discussed in the legislative history, the different levels of government use different research to develop regulations and procedures to implement the policy of student achievement goals in performance evaluations. Most often, the research comes from general topics on distributed leadership (the influence of the principal on the assistant principal), jobs, roles and responsibilities of the assistant principal and general educational personnel evaluation (as there is not much specific research on assistant principal evaluation). In return, the researchers in these topic areas will then study the effects and implementation of these policies.

The research literature also constructs and makes sense by interacting with each topic. The job, roles and responsibilities are affected by the distributive leadership policies of the principals. The methods a principal uses to determine if an assistant principal should be responsible for tasks such as hiring, or safety become part of the roles of the assistant principal. The tasks of an assistant principal (jobs, roles and responsibilities) are those parts of the position that an assistant principal should be evaluated upon. The evaluation set for by the local educational agency is informed by the topics of distributed leadership, jobs, roles, responsibilities and proper evaluation protocols, which are in turn then studied by the academic community.

As the primary implementers of this policy, the government has created a situation in which the study of the assistant principals' perspective on how student achievement data in personnel evaluation is implemented can be done using the co-construction and sense-making theoretical frameworks. Using the co-construction and sense-making frameworks, the following research questions will be pursued in this study:

1. How does the student achievement goal in the performance evaluation of the assistant principal connect to their job tasks and responsibilities?
 - a. What factors do assistant principals identify as influencing the development of the subject and measurement of the student achievement goal in their performance evaluations?
2. What demographic or geographic factors may help explain the focus of the student achievement goal in the performance evaluation of the assistant principal?

Chapter Three

The federal government began to enact policies that reflected an increased role in education policy after World War II. A dramatic increase in the role of the federal government can be tracked over the last 20 years. In response to changes in federal requirements regarding the evaluation of educational personnel, the Commonwealth of Virginia changed existing policy. Virginia Code § 22.1-253 was modified in 2012 to reflect changes in evaluation criteria (VA Code § 22.1-253 & Virginia Department of Education, 2012). This significant change required that Virginia react with additional legislation as well as executive branch regulation. As a result of this requirement, Virginia required that assistant principals include a student achievement goal and that it be weighted at 40% of the total evaluation (Virginia Department of Education, 2012). Again in 2018, as a response to the adoption of Every Student Succeeds Act on the federal level, Virginia responded with additional legislation and executive regulation changing the measurements for school accreditation (P.L. 114-95, Virginia Department of Education, 2018).

The purpose of this study was to examine the process assistant principals in Virginia use to choose a student achievement goal for their performance evaluation, including external factors that may be present to influence the process as well as how the goal relates to the job tasks the assistant principal completes within his or her position.

This chapter describes the methods used in conducting this study including the design of the research, the selection of the subjects, development of the survey, data collection, and analysis of the data.

Research Questions

This study explores the following research questions:

1. How does the student achievement goal in the performance evaluation of the assistant principal connect to their job tasks and responsibilities?
 - a. What factors do assistant principals identify as influencing the development of the subject and measurement of the student achievement goal in their performance evaluations?
2. What demographic or geographic factors may help explain the focus of the student achievement goal in the performance evaluation of the assistant principal?

Selection of Participants

To conduct this study, I contacted, via electronic mail, all assistant principals in Virginia with a publicly available electronic mail address. This comprehensive list included assistant principals from each level of education (K-12) and all eight geographic areas of Virginia in the study. A list of public-school divisions was obtained from the website of the Virginia Department of Education. There were 1,804 K-12 traditional public schools in 132 local educational agencies (LEA) or school districts listed on the publicly available public-school list from the Virginia Department of Education webpage. Within the list of schools available 1,159 schools were elementary schools, 330 school

were middle schools, and 315 schools were high schools. For the purposes of this study all non-traditional public schools in Virginia were excluded, including any charter schools as not all the laws and regulations apply to these educational environments.

Upon identification of as a traditional public school in Virginia, the website of each school district was searched to find the electronic mail address of all employees with the title of assistant principal. Any other title of administration was excluded. The selection of participants for this study was based on a collection of electronic mail addresses available on school websites throughout Virginia using the comprehensive list of schools provided by the Virginia Department of Education. The survey population included assistant principals from different geographic regions of the commonwealth and electronic mail addresses were categorized by level of school (elementary, middle, and high) to gain a representative proportion. The criteria for participation was that the participant was a current assistant principal in a Virginia Public School with a publicly available electronic mail address at the time of survey distribution. Upon review of the websites of the traditional public schools listed on the VDOE website, it was determined that a total of 412 schools would not be included in the survey. There were 69 elementary schools with no available electronic mail addresses for the assistant principals listed and 235 elementary schools with no assistant principal. At the middle school level, there were 24 schools with no available electronic mail address for the assistant principal and 19 middle schools with no assistant principal. For the high schools listed on the VDOE list, there were 19 high schools with no available electronic mail addresses for the

assistant principals listed and 22 high schools with no assistant principal. The exclusion of the schools for the purposes stated allowed for a total of 1392 schools for participation.

Table 2. Schools excluded from participation.

| School Level | Electronic Mail Unavailable | No Assistant Principal |
|--------------|-----------------------------|------------------------|
| Elementary | 69 | 235 |
| Middle | 24 | 19 |
| High | 19 | 22 |

The survey was distributed to all the electronic mail addresses that were compiled. There was a total of 2,247 assistant principals contacted for participation in the survey. There were 957 assistant principals at the elementary school level, 526 assistant principals at the middle school level, and 764 assistant principals at the high school level. For this study a participation rate between 30% and 50% was preferred – but was not possible, as this response rate would be expected of a survey that came from an internal source (Dillman, Smyth, & Christian, 2014). However, Dillman et al. (2014) indicate that a survey response rate from an external entity will usually only receive a 10%-15% response rate. For participation in this survey, 273 assistant principals responded; the overall participation rate in this survey was 12.15%. The overall participation rate falls within the response rate that is acceptable by Dillman et al. (2014).

Table 3. Participation rate by level.

| Level | Number of Available Assistant Principals | Number of Participating Assistant Principals | Participation Rate |
|------------|--|--|--------------------|
| Elementary | 957 | 123 | 12.9% |
| Middle | 526 | 58 | 11.03% |
| High | 764 | 92 | 12.04% |
| Total | 2,247 | 273 | 12.15% |

The responses have been reviewed to determine that an adequate number of assistant principals from each level of school have participated to provide results for analysis. The adequate response rate of 10%-15% at each level was reached within seven days; therefore, an additional request was not made via electronic mail.

The participants of this survey have additional descriptors based on the responses from this research. Based on the length of the time as assistant principal 56.8% have served in the position for one to five years – these assistant principals have always been evaluated under an evaluation system that included a student achievement goal. However, 43.2% of the participants have been assistant principals six or more years (26.4% have been in the role for six to 10 years, and 16.8% of the participants have been in the role 11 or more years) and have been evaluated under an evaluation system that did not include a student achievement goal. The participants were 35.5% male, 63.4% female, and 0.73% of the respondents preferred not to respond. Among the participants, 48.7% indicated that their career plans include pursuing the principalship.

The participants also described the school environment in which they served. In describing the school district, 14.7% said the district was urban, 22.7% described the

district as rural, 57.5% of the respondents work in a suburban school district, and 4.1% work in a small city school district. Among the participants, 61.5% of assistant principals work in a school that has additional assistant principals. The participants also responded indicating their school accreditation – 89.4% of schools represented are fully accredited, 7.3% of schools are accredited with conditions, 0.73% serve schools in which accreditation had been denied, and 2.6% responded that they did not know the accreditation of the school they served. The participants also reported their schools’ free and reduced lunch rate and the percentage of the student population who are English Language Learners (ESOL levels one through five), which have been combined into a table below.

Table 4. School District Demographics.

| Percentage | Free and Reduced Lunch | ESOL Levels 1-5 |
|------------|------------------------|-----------------|
| 0%-10% | 9.9% | 50.9% |
| 11%-20% | 13.9% | 20.1% |
| 21%-30% | 11.7% | 5.5% |
| 31%-40% | 14.3% | 5.9% |
| 41%-50% | 15.8% | 4.8% |
| 51%-75% | 17.9% | 6.2% |
| 76%-100% | 14.7% | 3.7% |
| Uncertain | 1.8% | 2.6% |

Research Design and Development

Pilot. A draft of the questions was provided to three (3) assistant principals in Virginia, including an assistant principal from a high school, middle school, and elementary school. The pilot survey sample represented a convenience sample, as I knew

each of them personally. Although all members of the pilot survey were female, they varied in the number of years each was in education, as well as the length of time each had been a teacher and an assistant principal. Two of the pilot study members wish to pursue a career as a principal while one is unsure of a future career path. At the time of the survey, they all worked in the same school division. The preemptive message and complete survey were sent via electronic mail according to the protocol of the study. Comments and suggestions from this group were collected using the questions listed in Appendix D and considered for changes in the survey instrument. This served as a pilot to determine if the survey questions solicited answers that were valuable to answer the research questions. This pilot was initiated as soon as IRB approval was obtained. This aspect of the study took approximately two weeks to complete. The first week, I provided the survey to the pilot participants and the participants read over the survey, answered the survey, and provided written feedback. During the second week, I either spoke on the phone or in person with the pilot participants to gather feedback using the questions in Appendix D. The participants in the pilot study were not included in the final study.

As a result of the pilot study, there were four questions that were slightly reworded to align the questions to receive better responses. The first question that was reworded was question six – the map of the VDOE regions of Virginia as it became clear that some larger districts in Virginia divided into regions within the district, I placed the word VDOE in front of the word region to provide additional clarification. In question nine, concern was expressed around the word “why,” and so the open-ended question was

slightly reworded to ask for the “reasons for choosing the student achievement goal” to provide clarity. Question 16 was re-worded to align with the newly established vocabulary regarding school accreditation set forth by the Virginia Department of Education. Therefore, terminology was changed so that as an assistant principal would look for the information, the forced answers would align. The final question to be re-worded was question 11 – as the term “set” your student achievement goal was confusing to the pilot participants. The word “set” was changed to “choose.”

Through the review of feedback from the pilot survey participants, there was some confusion presented by the assistant principals as to what the purpose of the survey and dissertation was going to be – they sought to understand the research questions. I reflected on the question that the assistant principals asked and provided them each with a copy of the cover letter that would be ahead of the survey questions and asked if this would have provided them with enough information to understand the purpose of the survey. This satisfied their quest for information.

As part of my reflection of the pilot study, I added four additional questions. In the initial survey, I asked the assistant principals about the daily duties that contributed to the student achievement goal, but I did not address how much control the assistant principal might have regarding the personnel who were carrying out the work around the student achievement goal. Therefore, I added the two questions about the assistant principal’s role in the hiring process as his or her current school. This information has provided information about the collaboration of the hiring process as well as direct input regarding the work of teachers in student achievement. The final two questions were

placed at the end of the survey and struck at the desire to understand how the assistant principals felt the student achievement goal affected their performance as an assistant principal. The decided reasoning the federal government used for putting student achievement goals in educational personnel evaluations was to place student achievement at the heart of the work (Gates Foundation, 2013; Students First 2013; Stronge, 2012). In measuring student achievement, hiring managers would be able to determine who the very best people were at each position of education because they were raising student achievement (Gates Foundation, 2013). This policy is an effort to have assistant principals become more responsive to student achievement and thus more effective at the job, and as such I must measure how effective the assistant principal feels about his or her efficacy in the position because of the student achievement goal.

Participant Gathering. To obtain data for this study, I conducted an electronic survey of assistant principals from around the Commonwealth of Virginia. The survey was constructed to provide data related to how assistant principals set student achievement goals in their performance evaluations. The assistant principal participation in this survey allowed for the analysis from different types of school districts and levels of schools. The use of surveys is an efficient way to gather data on a subject to be studied (Dillman et al. 2014). The 23-question survey used a variety of types of questions to obtain data that resulted in qualitative data that has been coded to draw conclusions.

The development of the first four questions of the survey was to collect demographic information about the assistant principal via multiple choice answers. In

questions five and six, participants described the school community. In the development of the survey, these initial questions provided the assistant principal to get into a rhythm of answering survey questions (Dillman et al., 2014). The simpler demographic questions were followed by three open-ended questions (questions seven, eight, and nine) that asked the assistant principal about the student achievement goal for the school, the performance evaluation and for a reason why the goal was chosen for the performance evaluation. Following the open-ended questions, the participants answered four multiple choice questions regarding how and any assistance the assistant principal received while setting the student achievement goal.

To determine the job tasks that the assistant principal relates to the student achievement goal, an open-ended question was asked about job related duties for question 14. Questions 15 and 16 relate to the participation of the assistant principal in the hiring process of teachers in the school. These questions, one multiple-choice and one open-ended, were to provide information regarding the autonomy of the assistant principal over the teachers who he or she supervises as part of the evaluation process. Question 17 asks the assistant principal about career plans in a multiple-choice format. Questions 18 through 20 relate to the accreditation and demographic information of the school. Questions 21 and 22 were placed onto a separate screen and asked the assistant principal's beliefs about the student achievement goal in his or her performance as well as why his or her beliefs stood.

To further explain the assistant principals' perceptions of the inclusion of student achievement goals in their performance evaluations, the final question (question 23) of

the survey was constructed in such a manner as to provide assistant principals with an opportunity to provide information regarding the process of student achievement goal setting in his or her school. I conducted a data analysis of this question by coding for themes to make generalizations regarding the connectedness between the student achievement goals and the daily work of the assistant principals as well as influences on their goals. In addition, I collected information about the similarities and differences of the student achievement goals of the assistant principals who are surveyed. Data collected from the survey was used to help describe the student achievement goal process for assistant principals in Virginia. This process helps inform the research about tasks, roles and responsibilities because it highlights the work of the assistant principal. The data also provided information about whether assistant principals with differing goals and length of service approached the student achievement goal differently. As a final consideration, the data helped to highlight any variance in the types of student achievement goals set by assistant principals.

Included in the 23-question survey are six open ended questions that provided assistant principals with the opportunity to share their student achievement goal, their reasoning for the goal choice, and a description of the process for setting the goal. Additional forced response questions (four questions) also allowed assistant principals to describe external factors and stakeholders who may have influenced the process. Eleven questions were forced response answers regarding demographics about the assistant principal and the school community in which the assistant principal serves.

The survey included demographic information questions about the assistant principals as well as about the schools they serve. For example, one question on the survey was regarding the length of time that the assistant principal was a classroom teacher. This is a critical area of study, as literature indicates that an assistant principal who has spent more than 10 years in the classroom is better able to lead in instructional issues (Hausman et al., 2002). This is of importance in this dissertation study, as the educational personnel evaluation policy dictated that instructional issues were to be at the heart of an administrator's student achievement goal (Virginia Department of Education, 2012).

Additional questions on the survey required the respondent to provide information about the school in which he or she served. These questions yield information regarding the cohesion of assistant principals within a school (do assistant principals in the same school share the same goal), connections between the level of school at which the assistant principal worked and the student achievement goal set, and how location may played a role in the types of student achievement goals and who or what influences how the assistant principal sets the goal.

The order of the questions was considered carefully. Understanding that whether a respondent will participate in a self-administered web survey is made quickly and within moments of viewing the survey, the first questions on this survey were presented in short, multiple choice forced answer display (Dillman et al., 2014). Viewing Appendix C, the first six questions will appear together and will be answered quickly by the respondent. These questions will be followed by three open-ended questions that will

encourage the respondent to spend additional time but answer the critical questions regarding the topics of the student achievement goal. The follow-up screen provided four questions that were multiple-choice, forced answer together and moved quickly. Followed by three questions presented together, two open-ended questions and a forced answer between that ask about duties and teacher hiring processes. These are followed by a separate screen with four forced-answer questions with demographic information. The last two open-ended questions were presented together and aimed to collect a response regarding the process and the assistant principal's feeling of control over the goal. The final question on the survey on a separate page offered the respondent an opportunity to share any additional information.

Data Collection

Using guidelines on web and mobile questions from Dillman et al. (2014) the questions for this survey was entered into Survey Monkey software. This method allowed the survey to be accessed by link and by URL to ease access. The use of this platform made it permissible for the researcher to group relevant questions onto a single screen, kept questions visible to an amount as to not to overwhelm the participant and allowed the participant to move through the survey efficiently (Dillman et al., 2014). The survey was delivered by electronic mail to all assistant principals with publicly available electronic mail addresses in tradition K-12 public school districts across Virginia.

A cover letter was provided to request consent for participation in the study. This cover letter also served to connect with the participant to increase participation (Dillman et al., 2014). Participation in this study was voluntary. Respondents' names were not

recorded, and the names of school districts were not asked. These protections reduced the risk of participation for the assistant principals. The data is maintained solely by the researcher and thus protected. The data from the survey was collected, coded and inputted into an SPSS database for correlation of data to be determined.

In accordance with the IRB application, five days prior to the data collection period, the assistant principals were contacted with an initial electronic mail message indicating that the survey was coming and what the survey was about. This action satisfied appropriate protocols to encourage participation (Dillman et al., 2014). The informed consent for the survey (Appendix A) was included on the first screen of the survey via the Survey Monkey. The survey was designed to take an assistant principal between 15 and 20 minutes to complete and the instructions encouraged the participant to complete the survey outside of working hours to prevent conflicts of interest. The survey was open for participation for a total of 14 days. On day 10, I provided a reminder to the participants of the open survey link (Appendix B). Consent was obtained digitally, and the Survey Monkey software recorded a date/time stamp. At the end of the survey, participants were given an option to withdraw from the survey. Survey participants received the explanation that there was no risk in participation and little to no benefit for their participation outside of professional reflection.

Analysis Procedures

The data from this survey was collected from all assistant principals electronically. The responses were cleared of all participants who did not consent (two participants) and any participants who did not complete all the survey questions (15

participants). The reduction of these participants left a final total of 273 participants. To better identify participants when using qualitative data, each assistant principal was assigned a number. Assistant principals at the elementary school level have a number beginning with 1000, at the middle school level a number beginning with 2000, and at the high school level a number beginning with 3000.

Table 5. Question Data Analysis

| Question | Data Collection Strategy | Data Analysis |
|--|---------------------------------|--|
| How does the assistant principal student achievement goal connect to their job tasks and responsibilities? | Survey – open ended questions | Coding for themes based on their performance evaluation categories |
| What factors influence the assistant principals in Virginia when developing the subject and measurement of the student achievement goal in their performance evaluation? | Survey | Coding of factors based on internal and external factors |
| What demographic or geographic factors may help explain the focus of the student achievement goal? | Survey: Forced choice questions | Categorizing |

As illustrated in Table 5, the analysis was divided by the types of questions the survey presented to participants. For questions one through six, these demographic questions were coded to provide an opportunity to be examined via participant statistics

as well as in chi-square or cross tab statistical evaluation with other survey questions, an acceptable reason to turn qualitative data into quantitative data (Saldaña 2016). Saldaña (2016) calls this type of coding “attribute coding.” The categorization of this data allowed the participants of this survey to be described in terms of gender, years of experience as an assistant principal, years of teachers prior to becoming an assistant principal, and the level of education at which the assistant principal works. This categorization also allowed for the description of where the school district is located and the type of location. In addition, this same process was used for questions 17 through 20; in which assistant principal participants described their career plans, the accreditation of their school, the percentage of students who receive free or reduced fees, and percentage of students who are English Language Learners (ESOL levels one through five). By quantifying the qualitative, analysis is used to determine if the group of participants is representative of assistant principals and to determine if the quantitative analytic results correspond with the qualitative coding conducted on the open-ended questions (Saldaña 2016).

To understand the topics of the assistant principal’s student achievement goal and to be able to use the data in a chi-square or cross tabs evaluation, the themes and patterns in the survey data were analyzed using categorizing (Glesne, 2009; Saldaña, 2016). To provide further analysis, the themes and patterns were sorted using cross-case analysis (Yin, 2011). This additional step allowed for categories to emerge from the data that spanned all survey questions (Glesne, 2009). Initially, my plan included the coding of student achievement goals based on job function as related to the literature, however, an

initial review of the student achievement goals indicated that was not possible (Glesne, 2009).

The initial review of the student achievement goals provided by the participants required a disassembly of the data without coding (Yin 2011). The disassemble resulted in 14 different categories for data, some of which were so small only two participant's goals were included in that category. However, this data review produced an emergent theme – the use of the new Standards of Accreditation (SOA) established by the Virginia Department of Education in 2017. As Saldaña (2016) recommends I used concept coding, in the macro level of meaning to data, I created a code for data that was included in the new SOA and a code for data that was not included in the SOA. Of the 273 participants, 72.2% of the respondents used a measurement found in the new SOA for the measurement of the student achievement goal.

Using descriptive coding Saldaña (2016), the student achievement goal was coded according to the different types of standards of accreditation for the goals that were aligned to this structure and then buckets of themes for those that were not aligned to the standards of accreditation. This type of coding allowed the researcher to provide a short word or phrase that described the goal and is appropriate for evaluation coding (Saldaña 2016). For the student achievement goals that were based in the SOA, I used the categories of the SOA to further code the student achievement goals. For the student achievement goals that did not include topics in the SOA, subgroups were created to reflect additional topics.

As of the 2018-2019 school year, the standards of quality for school accreditation for all schools include: overall proficiency and growth in English reading/writing achievement (including progress of English learners toward English-language proficiency), overall proficiency and growth in mathematics, overall proficiency in science, English achievement gaps among student subgroups, mathematics achievement gaps among student subgroups, and absenteeism. For high school accreditation there are also standards for the graduation index, dropout rate, and to be implemented for the 2021-22 school year - college, career and civic readiness (Virginia Department of Education, 2018). In using these standards, the overall growth in English and English achievement gaps among student subgroups were combined and math overall proficiency and growth among student subgroups were combined.

Data analysis was conducted to describe the types of student achievement goals using certain demographic data. To provide answers to research questions regarding factors that influence the student achievement goal in performance evaluations, I analyzed the data using chi-square or cross-tabs. Statistical analysis of categorical survey data was completed using SPSS version 24. A chi-square test for independence compares two variables in a contingency table to see if the variables are related (Dimitrov, 2009). It is a nonparametric test and uses a contingency table to analyze data. Chi-square tests only provide associations between categorical variable and does not provide inferences about causation (Dimitrov, 2009). The contingency table (also known as crosstab) is used by placing one categorical variable in the rows and another categorical variable in the columns. Both the rows and the columns must have two or more categories and each

cell provide the total count of cases for the pair of categories (Dimitrov, 2009) This allowed me to determine if certain categorical factors were related to the student achievement goal an assistant principal set. The higher the participation rate, the more evidence I would have to explain how assistant principals set student achievement goals and what factors may be related to the student achievement goals. The number of respondents represented an adequate sample as set forth by Dillman et al. (2014).

Additional qualitative questions within the survey (questions 14, 16, and 22) were not coded for use in quantitative analysis but were used to provide corroborating evidence as provided by the respondents. The use of data provided in question seven was to examine the consistency between the school student achievement goals and the student achievement goal used by the assistant principal for the performance evaluation. Finally, question 23 was used to provide additional information from the respondents' perspective regarding the student achievement goal.

This study provided clarity regarding the kind of student achievement goals that are being used for personnel evaluation. In addition, information was obtained regarding who has influence over the assistant principal's student achievement goal. This study also provided clarity regarding the types of instructional leadership skills should be present in job descriptions for assistant principals. Data was gained regarding outside factors that influence student achievement goals in performance evaluation. The goal of policy makers when the inclusion of student achievement goals in performance evaluations was completed was to have an increased focus on student achievement. The data collected in this survey provided evidence about the topics of the student

achievement goals and how those goals are set to focus on student achievement (Gates Foundation, 2013; Students First 2013; Stronge, 2012).

Conclusion

To address the research questions of this study, I have identified and collected the electronic mail addresses of assistant principals in public schools at all levels throughout Virginia. The survey was developed using strategies to persuade participation and to promote continuous engagement with the survey questions. A pilot study was conducted to determine if suitable answers would be obtained. The response rate of 12.71% was deemed appropriate for this type of external survey research and yielded 273 useable responses. The responses were coded based on the alignment to the Standards of Accreditation and to themes just related to student achievement. This information provided an understanding of the themes of student achievement goals for the purpose of analysis.

Chapter Four

As the involvement of the federal government increased over time, the requirements for evaluating assistant principals in employee performance evaluations have changed. The current requirements for assistant principal employee performance evaluation were put into place in July 2013 and require that 40% of the performance evaluation be set aside for the student achievement goal. The student achievement goal is set by the assistant principal during their evaluation meeting at the beginning of the school year. The use of a student achievement goal in measuring the performance of the assistant principal substantially changed the evaluation criterion for those serving in this position. As this provision has been implemented, it has become necessary to study the process by which the student achievement goal is set and how it relates to the job tasks and responsibilities of the assistant principals.

This study explores the following research questions:

1. How does the student achievement goal in the performance evaluation of the assistant principal connect to their job tasks and responsibilities?
 - a. What factors do assistant principals identify as influencing the development of the subject and measurement of the student achievement goal in their performance evaluations?

2. What demographic or geographic factors may help explain the focus of the student achievement goal in the performance evaluation of the assistant principal?

Themes of the Student Achievement Goals

To better understand the nature of the student achievement goals reported by assistant principals, the themes of the student achievement goal were coded to determine the focus of the goals. The first round of coding conducted determined if the student achievement goal used by the assistant principal was related to the recently adjusted Standards of Accreditation (SOA). The second round of coding was conducted to determine themes in the SOA and non-SOA student achievement goals.

Among the 273 participants of this survey, 72.2% (197/273) reported a student achievement goal that was related to the Standards of Accreditation of Virginia (as changed in 2017). The additional 27.8% (76/273) of participants had student achievement goals related to other areas of achievement. As The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) required, Virginia was required to change the way schools were evaluated. The Every Student Succeeds Act eliminated the requirement for 100% proficiency in reading and math; instead allowing states to set their own goals and milestones in the categories listed. These categories include results on state standardized tests in reading, math, and science, English language learner proficiency, one other academic measure, and at least one non-academic measure. English and math require disaggregation by subgroup. In addition, ESSA requires that all high schools be held to a graduation

standard. Nonacademic measurements include school climate, student or educator engagement, access to advanced coursework, and post-secondary readiness.

Standards of Accreditation Themes. The Virginia Department of Education (2017) set the following academic standards for accreditation in Virginia public schools: English achievement is measured by overall achievement, subgroup achievement, and English language learner proficiency progress, math overall and subgroup achievement, and science overall achievement. For non-academic achievement, schools at all levels are measured by chronic absenteeism and school climate. At the high school level, schools are also measured by dropout rate and the graduation & completion index.

Of the 197 participants whose goals related to the standards of accreditation, the overall themes of the student achievement goals focusing on areas of standards of accreditation are in English and math achievement. Among these student achievement goals; the combination SOL subgroup and overall scores are also prevalent.

Table 6. Themes of Student Achievement Goals using Standards of Accreditation.

| Code Letter | Theme | Count |
|-------------|------------------------------------|-------|
| A | English Overall | 21 |
| B | Math Overall | 13 |
| C | Science | 7 |
| D | English Subgroup Performance | 18 |
| E | Math Subgroup Performance | 17 |
| F | Chronic Absenteeism | 16 |
| G | Graduation Rate/Drop Out | 6 |
| H | College and Career Readiness | 6 |
| I | Generic Reference | 26 |
| J | Combination of SOL Subgroup Scores | 47 |
| K | Combination of SOL Overall Scores | 20 |
| L | Non-SOA Goals | 76 |

Non-Standards of Accreditation Themes. Among the 76 respondents who reported a student achievement goal that was not SOA related, four categories emerged. Themes that related directly to promoting student achievement – history performance (5), overall student achievement (3), grades (4), and retentions (2). The other student achievement goals used by assistant principals included topics that would be indirect influences on student achievement such as: student and community engagement (extracurricular activities: 3, PBIS: 6, student feedback: 1, social and emotional skills: 1, reduction of discipline referrals: 5, communication: 1), teacher development (reading strategies: 12, instructional strategies: 14, professional development: 2, computer integration: 1, math strategies: 3, peer observations: 3, PLC meetings: 3, vertical articulations: 1, multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) implementation: 2, writing strategies: 2), and compliance (special education paperwork: 2).

Table 7. Non-SOA Student Achievement Goal Topics.

| Category | Topics | Count |
|----------------------------------|--|-------|
| Promoting Student Achievement | History Performance | 5 |
| | Overall Student Achievement | 3 |
| | Grades | 4 |
| | Retentions | 2 |
| Student and Community Engagement | Extracurricular Activities | 3 |
| | PBIS | 6 |
| | Student Feedback | 1 |
| | Social and Emotional Skills | 1 |
| | Reduction in Discipline | 5 |
| | Referrals | |
| | Communication | 1 |
| | Teacher Development | 12 |
| Teacher Development | Reading Strategies | 12 |
| | Instructional Strategies | 14 |
| | Professional Development | 2 |
| | Computer Integration | 1 |
| | Math Strategies | 3 |
| | Peer Observations | 3 |
| | PLC Meetings | 3 |
| | Vertical Articulations | 1 |
| | Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) | 2 |
| | Writing Strategies | 2 |
| Compliance | Special Education Paperwork | 2 |

Goal Structures. The student achievement goals not related to standards of accreditation were more general in their approach (not in a SMARTR goal format). For example, respondent 3090 presented the following student achievement goal: “increasing the amount of visible thinking strategies in the classroom.” This is an instructional goal; however, it does not give a timebound or measurable outcome for the assistant principal to score the student achievement goal. When assistant principals were using the standards of accreditation to set the student achievement goals, they were more likely to use the SMARTR goal format. For example, respondent 3051 listed a student

achievement goal of “by graduation date, all seniors at risk of not graduating will have met all graduation requirements.” This example provides a goal that is timebound and measurable for the assistant principal to be graded against in the performance evaluation which is graded against the Standards of Accreditation measurements of both a graduation rate and dropout rate.

Connections Between Job Tasks and Student Achievement Goals

As is indicated in the literature, the job tasks and responsibilities of the assistant principal are different from the principal and often are not reflected fully reflected in the job description provided to an applicant for the position. Among the assistant principal participants of this study, 181 participants or 66.3% reported that their goal was based on a curriculum area or grade level for which they are directly responsible. However, 62 assistant principals or 22.7% reported that the student achievement goal in their performance evaluation is not reflective a curriculum area or grade level for which they are responsible. Additionally, there were 30 assistant principals or 11% who needed to explain whether they supervised the curriculum area or grade level in their student achievement goal. These assistant principals responded with areas of student achievement that were schoolwide – discipline, behavior, accreditation, all the school goals were listed in all administrators’ performance evaluation, thus providing a model of distributive leadership for these schools. Of particular note, 15 of the assistant principals in this group of 30 (a full 50%) reported that they worked in a school in which they were the only assistant principal – this means that the assistant principal and the principal shared goals, despite not sharing job descriptions or job tasks.

In examining the relationships of the student achievement goals of the assistant principals, a chi-square analysis of the goal as it related to the Standards of Accreditation (SOA) and whether the goal is based on curriculum area or grade level supervised revealed no association ($X^2(4, n = 273) = 5.019, p = 0.285$). The chi-square evaluation of the relationships between the non-SOA topic student achievement goals of assistant principals and whether the goal is based on curriculum area or grade level supervised was determined to be untrustworthy as 71% of the topics had a count fewer than five. The minimum expected count is 0.07.

Assistant principals who participated in this study reported the length of time employed as an assistant principal. For assistant principals who were employed in the position longer than five years, these respondents were in the position prior to the inclusion of the student achievement goal in performance evaluations. Of the study respondents, 155 or 56.8% assistant principals were in their first five years as an assistant principal. Among the participants, 72 or 26.4% were in year six through 10, and 46 or 16.8% were in the position for more than 11 years. Initially, I coded these time categories individually, but upon further reflection of the policy implementation timeline, it became clear that the assistant principals who were in the position for fewer than five years might approach their perceptions of the student achievement goal differently than those who had been in the position for six or more years, as those assistant principals with six or more years of experience had been evaluated with performance evaluations without the student achievement goal.

Table 8: Assistant Principal Length in Position

| Length of AP Experience | Count | Percentage |
|-------------------------|-------|------------|
| 1-5 Years | 155 | 56.8% |
| 6+ Years | 118 | 43.2% |

Using the coding on the length of time as an assistant principal – either five or fewer years (A) or six or more years (B) – I conducted a cross tabulation analysis to determine if there was any relationship between the length of time as an assistant principal and the topic of the student achievement goal. A chi-square analysis of the relationship between the length of time an assistant principal was in the position and the category of the student achievement goal revealed no significant relationship.

A chi-square analysis did not report any significant relationships ($X^2 (11, n = 273) = 13.013, p = 0.292$). The cross tabulation did show some differences in focus between the categories of assistant principals. The cross-tabulation table below illustrates the difference in the focus on the student achievement goal category of overall math – longer-serving assistant principals are more focused on the student achievement goal of overall math than their shorter-serving counterparts. Also, in the area of math achievement, there is a similar trend where longer-serving assistant principals are more focused on the math subgroup achievement. The assistant principals who have served five or fewer years are more likely to be focused on absenteeism than their longer-serving peers. In addition, the assistant principals who have less experience in the position are also more likely to have a generic standards of accreditation goal – this means it is less

specific and less measurable, indicating a need for more guidance to develop an actionable goal.

Table 9: Length of Service as Assistant Principal, Student Achievement Goal Crosstabulation

| Category | | Five or Fewer Years | Six or More Years | Total |
|-----------------------|----------------|---------------------|-------------------|-------|
| Overall Math | Count | 6 | 7 | 13 |
| | Expected Count | 7.4 | 5.6 | 13 |
| | Residual | -1.4 | 1.4 | |
| Math Achievement Gaps | Count | 8 | 9 | 17 |
| | Expected Count | 9.7 | 7.3 | 17 |
| | Residual | -1.7 | 1.7 | |
| Absenteeism | Count | 11 | 5 | 16 |
| | Expected Count | 9.1 | 6.9 | 16 |
| | Residual | 1.9 | -1.9 | |
| Generic Reference | Count | 19 | 7 | 26 |
| | Expected Count | 14.8 | 11.2 | 26 |
| | Residual | 4.2 | -4.2 | |

Existing research on the assistant principal role indicates that one of the job tasks of the position is typically the evaluation of teachers (Marshall & Hooley, 2006). Additional research on the effects on student achievement progress indicates that the single biggest factor within the school building is the quality of the teacher in the classroom (Marzano et al., 2005). Therefore, when conducting an evaluation of the assistant principal on student achievement performance, one would evaluate the relationship between the involvement of the assistant principal in the hiring of teachers and the topic of the student achievement goal in the assistant principal performance

evaluation. An assistant principal who was being evaluated on student achievement goals would want influence over hiring the best person as that single, greatest factor within the school on student achievement. Participants in this study were asked how much influence they had over the hiring process of teachers they supervise, and their responses are summarized in Table 10. The majority of assistant principals reported playing a role in hiring along with either their principal or other stakeholders. There were also 11 participants who reported having no input on the hiring process of teachers. In addition, no assistant principal reported being the sole decision maker regarding the hiring of teachers that they supervise

Table 10: Assistant Principal Involvement in Teacher Hiring Process

| Answer Option | Frequency | Percent |
|--|-----------|---------|
| AP is sole decision maker in hiring teachers | 0 | 0 |
| AP is initial interviewer, but principal makes final hiring decisions | 78 | 28.6 |
| AP is involved in hiring process but other stakeholders have input on hiring | 129 | 47.3 |
| AP has no input on which students are hired | 11 | 4 |
| AP and leadership team hire teachers | 34 | 12.5 |
| No answer | 21 | 7.7 |

This data was used to conduct a chi-square analysis between the relationship of the topic of the student achievement goal and the amount of influence an assistant principal has over the teacher hiring process. There was no significant relationship between the control of the assistant principals over the teacher hiring process and the type of student achievement goal the assistant principal chooses for the performance

evaluation, $X^2(24, n = 273) = 22.201, p = 0.567$); however, the data was also deemed to be untrustworthy due to the low average count in the cross-tabs table.

The final relationship this study sought to understand was the assistant principals' perspective regarding whether the inclusion of the student achievement goal in the performance evaluation made the person a more effective assistant principal in their school. Among the 273 assistant principal respondents, 167 respondents or 61.2% that they believed the inclusion of their student achievement goal made them a more effective assistant principal. The other assistant principal respondents indicated that it did not make them a more effective assistant principal – 93 participants or 34.1% and 13 participants or 4.8% indicated they were unsure.

A chi-square analysis was conducted using SPSS. For the purposes of this study, there was not a significant relationship between the effectiveness of the student achievement goal as assessed by the assistant principal and the type of student achievement goal: $X^2(33, N = 273) = 28.876, p = .673$. However, these results are untrustworthy because 64.6% of the cells have an expected count of less than 5.

Qualitative analysis of the survey data yielded a more comprehensive understanding of the reasons why some student achievement goals made participants feel more effective as assistant principals. The respondents who believe that they are more effective as a result of the student achievement goal in the performance evaluation indicated the goal provided focus and accountability. Most responses were like respondent 2012: “Having a specific goal gives me a focus and allows for meaningful reflection.” For some, it allowed them to bend their practices as assistant principals. For

example, respondent 3064 provided the following explanation: “Because I constantly monitor instruction and attendance to meet the goals, I am constantly learning with on-the-job experiences.” Another participant respondent 1005, provided this reason: “It drives my ability to be visible in classrooms, active in lesson planning & instructional delivery/coaching, and focused on goal setting with specific students and/or teachers.”

The reasons provided by the 34.1 % of respondents who indicated that their student goals did not make them more effective ranged from the process feeling contrived, to the belief that student academic achievement was not the only measure of success, to the job tasks of the day not leading toward work that is measured in the student achievement goal. For example, respondent 1050 said, “Having the goal as a part of my evaluation does not necessarily make me more effective, but not because the goal isn't impactful. I would set and work towards goals, including this one, regardless of its inclusion in my evaluation process.” Respondent 1065 replied, “I believe it's time to focus on something other than SOL tests! We test our students too much and we start too young. We've taken the fun and creativity out of elementary school. Our focus should be on interaction, collaboration, problem solving, and social/emotional learning. We can have these things as ‘secondary’ goals, but not as the primary.” Respondent 2014 indicated, “I do not work with a specific group. I work with all our students mainly through discipline, mental health needs, social needs. Unfortunately, I do not get in the classrooms or affect instruction as much as I would like.”

For the 13 assistant principals who reported that they were uncertain if it made them more effective, one reported that it was their first year as an assistant principal. The

other 12 reported that the goal was not aligned with the work they did in the building. For example, respondent 2021 reported, “I was required to create a math goal, but I do not supervise math.” Another assistant principal, respondent 3010, felt that the school was so large that the goals were not specific to individual assistant principals.

Respondent 1092 felt the goals were unrealistic but allowed focus, reporting, “In my experience, I've sometimes been encouraged to write goals that indicate unattainable expectations for all reporting categories. I don't often get the kind of feedback from my principal, usually because of time and the busy-ness of our work. In addition, we often duplicate reporting categories or groups of students. The goal process does, however, make me more focused on a portion of the data and review it regularly from the same lens to compare, which I do see as a positive.”

Factors of Influence Identified by Assistant Principals

Previous research indicates that a range of factors can influence the performance of the assistant principal (Barnett et al., 2012). This survey examined the following influences over the assistant principal’s choice of student achievement goals: where and from whom the assistant principal received guidance and training about the student achievement goal, who the assistant principal worked with to choose the student achievement goal, whether the assistant principal had the same goal as others, the level of accreditation of the school, how long the assistant principal was a teacher prior to becoming an assistant principal, at what level of education the assistant principal is a leader, and the future career plans of the assistant principal. These factors were chosen to be included in the survey because previous research indicated that these factors influence

an assistant principal's ability to be an instructional leader or to see themselves as successful instructional leaders – both of which are necessary to lead gains in student achievement and fit with the policy goals of placing emphasis on student achievement in performance evaluations.

Student achievement goals in employee personnel evaluations were new to all employees in 2013. As part of this survey, I sought to understand how assistant principals received professional development regarding setting and using student achievement goals for their performance evaluations. This question was asked as a multiple-choice response and also had a final choice labelled “other” that allowed assistant principals to describe the process if it did not fit. Responses were coded to match options. Among the 273 participants, seven or 2.6% were referred to an employee performance manual; 130 or 47.6% were referred to their direct supervisor; 10 were trained through a central office professional development session; 37 or 13.6% were required to set the goal without any training; and 89 or 32.6% described another process. These responses indicate that for most assistant principals participating in this study, the principal is providing both the information on how to select a student achievement goal as well as the evaluation of the results.

Additionally, the assistant principals were asked who they work with to establish their student achievement goal in their performance evaluation. Among the respondents of this survey, 217 or 79.5% of the participating assistant principals reported that they worked with their principals to establish their student achievement goals. Twenty-two or 8.1% of the assistant principals reported setting the student achievement goal by

themselves; eight reported they worked with a fellow assistant principal; eight worked with teachers whom they supervise; and another 18 or 6.6% provided additional responses.

The participants of this survey reported if they had any additional assistant principals in their schools. Among the participants, 61.5% (168/273) of assistant principals reported that they have at least one additional assistant principal at their school. Of the 273 participants, 65 assistant principals or 23.8% reported that they have the same student achievement goal as the other assistant principal(s) at their school. For 103 participants or 37.7% they had an individual student achievement goal that did not match their assistant principal colleagues. Among the respondents, 106 participants or 38.5% reported that there were no additional assistant principals to share a goal within their building.

Among the 65 assistant principals who reported having the same student achievement goal as their colleagues in the building, 35 reported that it was a content or grade level for which they are directly responsible. These 35 respondents represented each grade level – 10 were elementary school level, 11 were middle school level, and 14 were high school level. In this analysis, there are 30 assistant principals who share a student achievement goal with their colleagues at the assistant principal level, but it does not represent a curriculum area or grade level for which they are responsible.

Another point of analysis was to examine if assistant principals shared student achievement goals with their same-positioned colleagues, and if they were likely to report a higher level of efficacy. Among the assistant principals who shared a student

achievement goal with their same-positioned colleagues, 61.5% of the assistant principals reported that the student achievement goal made them a more effective assistant principal. The assistant principals who reported an individual student achievement goal separate from their same-positioned colleagues 55.9% reported having a belief that the student achievement goal made them more effective. For those assistant principals who had no additional assistant principals in their building with whom to share their work, 61.9% of the assistant principals reported that the student achievement goal made them more effective.

When developing this study, a question was placed on the survey for assistant principals to identify the level of accreditation for the employing school according to the VDOE. This question was to determine if schools that were fully accredited were moving beyond standard of accreditation student achievement goals as the Virginia and United States Departments of Education (2017) were encouraging schools to move. Of the 273 participants, 89.4% (244/273) of the assistant principals reported leading a school that was fully accredited; 20 or 7.3% of assistant principals reported being accredited with conditions; two assistant principals worked at schools where accreditation was denied; and seven did not know their current accreditation status – this would indicate that the assistant principal was working at a fully accredited school or there would be additional paperwork and school improvement plans to be developed.

Of the assistant principals who reported working at a fully accredited school, 71.8% were evaluated on a student achievement goal that related to the standard of accreditation – which was already fully met. This indicates that the desire by the Virginia

and United States Departments of Education that the student achievement goals go beyond state standardized measures was not being realized, as these were assistant principals at schools where student achievement could have been pushed beyond this measurement. The topics of the student achievement goals among these group was almost evenly spread among the different measurements in the standards of accreditation. For the assistant principals who reported being in a school accredited with conditions, 70% of the assistant principals used a goal that was a topic of a standard of accreditation. The standards of accreditation topics for these assistant principals represented mostly a combination of literacy and math subgroups or overall performance – likely the standard of accreditation that was causing the conditions to be attached by the Virginia Department of Education. For the two assistant principals for whom accreditation was denied, each had a student achievement goal related to the standards of accreditation, and both reported to be focused on English performance. Among the seven assistant principals who were unsure about their accreditation, only one had a goal that was not focused on the standards of accreditation. For those who did have a goal focused on accreditation, the goal was mostly based in literacy.

The Virginia assistant principals who responded to this survey reported the length of time each spent as a classroom teacher prior to becoming an assistant principal. Among the participants there were 25 or 9.2% with five or fewer years of experience, 113 or 41.4% with six to 10 years of experience, and 135 or 49.5% with 11 or more years of experience. Previous research has provided evidence that assistant principals who spent 10 or more years in the classroom prior to becoming an administrator had higher efficacy

around instructional leadership – the focus of a student achievement goal for leaders. For the purposes of this study, there was not a significant relationship between the amount of time an assistant principal spent as a teacher and the type of student achievement goal in the performance evaluation: $X^2(16, N = 273) = 23.431, p < .103$. However, these results are untrustworthy because 44.4% of the cells have an expected count of less than 5.

Participants in this survey reported the level of education at which they were serving in the assistant principal position. Among the respondents, 45.1% (123/273) serve at the elementary level; 58 or 21.2% serve at the middle school level; and 92 or 33.7% of the participants serve at the high school level. This study determined a significant association between the assistant principal's school level and the topic of the student achievement goal, $X^2 = (16, N = 273) = 57.556, p < .001$.

Table 11: Cross-Tabulation of School Level Served and Student Achievement Goal Topic

| Topic | | Elementary | Middle | High | Total |
|--|----------------|------------|---------|---------|-------|
| Overall Proficiency and growth in English | Count | 21 | 12 | 6 | 39 |
| | Expected Count | 17.6 | 8.3 | 13.1 | 39 |
| | Residual | 3.4 | 3.7 | -7.1 | |
| Reading and writing and English Achievement Gaps | Count | 10 | 6 | 14 | 30 |
| | Expected Count | 13.5 | 6.4 | 10.1 | 30 |
| | Residual | -3.5 | -0.4 | 3.9 | |
| Absenteeism | Count | 2 | <2 | 13 | 16 |
| | Expected Count | 7.2 | 3.4 | 5.4 | 16 |
| | Residual | -5.2 | $N < 2$ | 7.6 | |
| Reading and Math Achievement gaps | Count | 24 | 14 | 9 | 47 |
| | Expected Count | 21.2 | 10.0 | 15.8 | 47 |
| | Residual | 2.8 | 4.0 | -6.8 | |
| Reading and Math Performance | Count | 15 | 4 | <2 | 20 |
| | Expected Count | 9 | 4.2 | 6.7 | 20 |
| | Residual | 6 | -0.2 | $n < 2$ | |

Assistant principals who participated in this survey reported some student achievement categories more than others. As illustrated in Table 11, assistant principals in the high school were less likely than their counterparts in elementary or middle school to be focused on overall proficiency and growth in English reading and writing and English subgroups together. Assistant principals in the elementary and middle school levels were more likely to be focused on English than math. The high school level assistant principals were more likely to be focused on math than English. At the high school level, more assistant principals have reported a focus on absenteeism. This is a new area of focus under the revised areas of accountability.

Assistant principals who seek to be principals approach the job tasks of the assistant principal differently than those who seek to continue to be a career assistant principal. The research shows that the focus of the job will change based on aspirations to the next level (Marshall & Hooley, 2006). One of the questions in this study focused on the career plans of assistant principals. As illustrated in Table 12, assistant principals in this study were asked about what they expected their next steps to be in their career. Assistant principals who had more definite plans expressed a higher level of efficacy by using the student achievement goal as their focus. A high percentage of participants reported seeking the principalship (48.7%).

Table 12: Career Plan of Assistant Principal to Efficacy

| Career Plan | Count | Percentage of Efficacy | Percentage No Efficacy |
|---------------------------------|-------|------------------------|------------------------|
| Principalship | 133 | 65.5% | 34.5% |
| Central Office | 23 | 78.3% | 27.8% |
| Continue as Assistant Principal | 55 | 61.8% | 36.5% |
| Undecided | 43 | 46.5% | 48.9% |
| Retire and/or Out of K-12 | 12 | 50% | 42.8% |
| No Answer | 7 | 28.6% | 71% |

Examining the length of time an assistant principal served as related to their career goals yielded the following results. The majority (52.9%) of assistant principals who were in the first five years of the position expressed their next career goal as becoming a principal. However, the percentage of assistant principals seeking a

principalship shrunk to 36.9% among those assistant principals in the position for 11 or more years. Additionally, assistant principals in the first five years of the position were less likely to want to continue to be an assistant principal for the foreseeable future – 18.1% compared to 28.3% for their more senior counterparts. The assistant principals with more time in the position were more uncertain about what the next position would be – 21.7% for those assistant principals with 11 or more years, as opposed to 16.7% of those with six to 10 years of experience, or 13.5% of those in the first five years of the position.

The career plans of assistant principals also reflected in whether the student achievement goal in the assistant principal's evaluation was tied to the standards of accreditation for the school. Assistant principals who were seeking positions in central office or a principalship were more likely to set a goal related to the standards of accreditation. The percentage of assistant principals who chose a goal related to the standards of accreditation was lower among the assistant principals who wanted to continue to be an assistant principal, were not sure of the next career step or who were ready to retire.

Table 13: Assistant Principal Career Plans and SOA Goals

| Assistant Principal Career Plans | Percentage with SOA Goal | Percentage with Non-SOA Goal |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------------|
| Principal | 72.7 | 27.6 |
| Central Office | 86.9 | 13.1 |
| Continue as Assistant Principal | 65.5 | 34.4 |
| Not Sure | 65.1 | 34.9 |
| Retire | 66.7 | 33.3 |
| No Answer | 71.4 | 28.6 |

Demographic or Geographic Influencing Factors

To understand the use of student achievement goals in performance evaluations for Virginia assistant principals, this study analyzed three key demographics of the schools that these assistant principals lead. The participants answered questions regarding the geography of their school district: urban, rural, suburban, small city, or other, and the two descriptors of population: the percentage of English Language Learners and the percentage of economically disadvantaged students among their student population. These demographic factors were then analyzed with the types of student achievement goals the assistant principals reported using qualitative analysis. A chi-square analysis did not find significant results; additionally, the results were unreliable due to the number of cells not reaching expected counts.

More than half of participants in this survey described their school district as being suburban – 157 participants or 57.5%. Forty or 14.7% of participants described their district as urban; 62 or 22.7% of participants described their district as rural; and 11 or 4.1% of participants reported small city. There were three assistant principals who

described their school district as a mix of town, suburban, and rural, which may indicate challenges for the school district to provide an adequate resource to serve all schools in the district.

Of the assistant principals who described their school districts as urban, 67.5% of them used a student achievement goal that was related to the Standards of Accreditation (SOA). Less than half of the urban assistant principals (16/40) who used an SOA-related student achievement goal used one that had to do with a combination of reading and math performance on end of the year standards of learning assessments. Rural assistant principals also heavily relied on the SOA for the topics of their student achievement goal. Among these assistant principals, 80.6% of the assistant principals used an SOA-related goal. Again, there was a heavy reliance on a combination of English and math combination goals. However, in this demographic, 11 of the 16 (or 68.8%) of the assistant principals who reported using chronic absenteeism as a student achievement goal were in rural school districts. Those assistant principals leading in small cities reported a 73.7% rate of using an SOA as a goal, with no specific topic of the SOA used more often than others. Among the three assistant principals who described their school districts, only one used an SOA goal, and it was related to English overall scores.

Assistant principals serving suburban school districts make up the largest number of survey participants – 157 or 51.5% of participants. Among these participants, 70.7% (111/157) had a student achievement goal related to an SOA. Among the suburban assistant principals, the student achievement goal regarding the SOA was more likely to be highly specific, as there was only nine assistant principals that reported a goal that had

a generic reference to the SOA. In addition, the suburban assistant principals were likely to focus on subgroup performance: 47.7% of the responses were either individually math or English subgroups or a combination of both math and English subgroup performance. This is also the subgroup that has most of the responses for the graduation rate (four out of the six previously reported in the study) and college and career readiness (also four out of the six previously reported in the study). This study determined a significant association between the assistant principal's school district location and the topic of the student achievement goal, $X^2 = (9, N = 273) = 18.189, p = .033$.

The survey used in this study asked assistant principals to report the percentage of students in their school who were economically disadvantaged, as reported in Table 4. To further analyze this data, the respondents were grouped into upper and lower halves. There were 136 participants or 50.7% who responded that 0%-40% of the students in their school were eligible for free and reduced lunch. The remaining 132 participants or 49.3% reported a higher free and reduced lunch rate, reporting that 41%-100% of their students were eligible for free and reduced lunch. These groups were then analyzed in terms of their student achievement goals.

Among the schools with fewer students eligible for free and reduced lunch, 68.4% (93/136) of assistant principals used a student achievement goal related to the SOA. These assistant principals were likely to use a subgroup performance indicator as their student achievement goal. Of these assistant principals, 41 of the 93 assistant principals used English subgroups, math subgroups, or both subgroup student achievement as the topic of the student achievement goal. In addition, five of the assistant principals

reported using the graduation or dropout rate as their student achievement goal – of all 273 participants, only six used this metric. A higher percentage of the assistant principals with more students eligible for free and reduced lunch reported using a SOA metric for their student achievement goal – 78.8%. This would be expected per previous research, as students who are economically disadvantaged struggle to keep academic pace with their wealthier peers due to a variety of factors. The assistant principals with a higher percentage of economically disadvantaged students are more likely than their counterparts in schools with fewer economically disadvantaged students to have a generic SOA goal – this could mean that the needs of the school are so overwhelming that all of the SOAs are included in the student achievement goal. To support the many needs of economically disadvantaged students, 30.3% (40/132) of the assistant principals in schools with a higher percentage of economically disadvantaged students are reporting a student achievement goal that combines both English and math – as an overall (13 of 20 reported goals, 65%) or in subgroups (27 of 47 goals, 57.7%).

The final demographic factor that was evaluated was the percentage of students who were English Language Learners (ELLs) in the school. About half of the assistant principals (50.9%) who participated in this survey had fewer than 10% of their students as ELLs. As a result of the imbalance in the reporting categories for ELLs, a description of the different reporting categories is necessary. Thirty-two or 23% of the assistant principals reporting an ELL population of less than 10% reported a student achievement goal not related to the SOAs at all. When the analysis brings together the bottom two percentage levels of the ELL population, 0%-10% and 11%-20%, the rate of assistant

principals who report a goal not related to SOAs continues to hold at 25%. There are 44 assistant principals in the middle three reporting categories: 21%-30%, 31%-40%, and 41%-50%. For these 44 assistant principals, 63.6% reported a student achievement goal related to the SOAs. The SOA topics of these goals were spread over all topics, except a combination of SOL overall scores.

Among the categories as reported in chapter three, the reporting categories of 51%-75% and 76%-100% of students as ELLs had a total of 27 assistant principals reporting. Among the 27 assistant principals who chose these two responses, 16 or 59.3% of the assistant principals were working on an SOA student achievement goal, and 10 assistant principals of the 16 or 62.5% were working on subgroup improvement goals, indicating that a subgroup of this size will impact the focus of student achievement. Conversely, 32 or 23% of the assistant principals reporting an ELL population of less than 10% reported a student achievement goal not related to the SOAs at all. When the analysis brings together the bottom two percentage levels of the ELL population, 0%-10% and 11%-20%, the rate of assistant principals who report a goal not related to SOAs continues to hold at 25%.

Summary

Although this study only revealed two significant relationships – between the student achievement goal and the school district location and between the student achievement goal and the level of school – the study did present many additional findings that are useful in exploring the student achievement goal in assistant principal employee evaluation. Overwhelmingly, assistant principals in Virginia are using the new standards

of accreditation in their performance evaluation, with 72.2% choosing to use standardized tests as measurements even when 89.4% of schools reported having achieved full accreditation. In addition, from this survey we learned that most assistant principals in Virginia received both professional development and goal setting from one source, the principal. This indicates that all the understanding around the use of the goal comes from one source.

This study also informed understandings regarding the impact over factors that influence the attainment of the student achievement goals. Only 66.3% of assistant principals reported using a goal in their evaluation that was based on a curriculum area. Assistant principals who were in the job longer reported an increased focus on math or a general goal focused on many areas of improvement, while their shorter-serving colleagues reported an increased focus on absenteeism. Although the teacher in the classroom is the most influential factor in student achievement, no assistant principal reported having sole control over teacher hiring for their curriculum area, though most reported some input over teacher hiring. In addition, 23.8% have the same goal as other assistant principals in the building, but more than half of those report having no oversight over the curriculum area represented in their goal. However, these assistant principals reported higher levels of efficacy.

This study was also able to report on the influence of the student achievement goal over the assistant principal's feeling of efficacy. There was no significant relationship between the student achievement goal and feelings of efficacy, however 61.2% reported feeling more effective. For those assistant principals, they felt the goal

provided a specific focus, meaningful reflection, and a purpose to be in classrooms for observation. For those assistant principals who felt no efficacy from the student achievement goal, the goal was just another representative of the standardized test, secondary thoughts were that the goals were not meaningful, school goals but not personal goals or unrealistic. Among the assistant principals who were seeking a central office role beyond their current position, the goal made them feel more efficacious and was more likely to be based in the new standards of accreditation.

Chapter Five

Beginning with the enactment of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 and the subsequent reauthorizations, the federal government has become more influential in state and local education policy (Cross, 2010). The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 was designed to shine a light on the achievement gaps as found by education researchers. Under the NCLB law, schools were measured against the performance of the overall school population and the designated subgroups of Asian, African Americans, Hispanic, white, economically disadvantaged, English Language Learners, and students with disabilities (U.S. Department of Education, 2002). As the United States Congress failed to reauthorize NCLB and the Great Recession took hold of the economy, schools began to suffer a loss of funding from the property taxes that were falling and the federal government for failing to meet progressively difficult proficiency standards from the NCLB law.

The Obama administration, as part of the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act, was able to use waivers to provide financial relief to states who were willing to enact changes to certain education policy provisions, most notably that school employee performance evaluations would include a student achievement goal worth between 33 and 50% of the evaluation (Students First, 2013). This policy was adopted by the Virginia General Assembly and Department of Education for implementation on July 1,

2013. Through The Every Student Succeeds Act of 2017, Congress and the Obama administration were able to codify the inclusion of the student achievement goals in the performance evaluations and change the measurement of accreditation of schools for overall performance and traditionally underperforming subgroups. Virginia, as well as other states, adopted the required provisions of the ESSA including the continued use of the student achievement goal in performance evaluations and the changed the measurements of school performance known as the Standards of Accreditation. The purpose of this study is to examine the choice, implementation and factor of influence regarding a Virginia assistant principal's choice of student achievement goal for their employee performance goal.

The assistant principal is a position in many schools throughout the United States, however, it is understudied in education research. Current education research for the assistant principal is focused on job tasks and does not focus on the complexities of leading in an organization without authority (Marshall & Hooley, 2006). Furthermore, although the position is considered a necessary steppingstone to becoming a principal, preparation programs focus on the principalship, causing fewer assistant principals to understand the job tasks they will be undertaking (Hausman et al., 2002). When reviewing the existing literature on evaluation, the focus has been on teachers through the quantitative impact of teachers by Hanushek (2011), the policy implications through Ingle, Rutledge, and Bishop (2011) or on principal's efficacy in leading a school to better student achievement through indirect decisions (Waters et al., 2003). Research does not address how to adequately evaluate the position of assistant principal. Using the research

of Stronge (2012) and the requirements of ESSA, Virginia created performance evaluations for school leaders that were uniform for the principal and assistant principal, despite different job descriptions and research that indicated the positional job tasks were different as well. Understanding the haste with which the policy was implemented coupled with the intersection of little research on the assistant principal; the study of how those in the assistant principal position were going to use the student achievement goals in their performance evaluations became necessary. This study sought to understand the following research questions among assistant principals in Virginia:

1. How does the student achievement goal in the performance evaluation of the assistant principal connect to their job tasks and responsibilities?
 - a. What factors do assistant principals identify as influencing the development of the subject and measurement of the student achievement goal in their performance evaluations?
2. What demographic or geographic factors may help explain the focus of the student achievement goal in the performance evaluation of the assistant principal?

Student Achievement Goals and Standards of Accreditation

The survey for this study was sent to all assistant principals in Virginia with a publicly available electronic mail address. This participation rate of this survey was 12.15% or 273 participants. Among the 273 participants, 197 or 72.2% of the participants reported a student achievement goal related to the Standards of Accreditation as amended in 2018. The development of using the student achievement goal in

educational personnel evaluation was supposed to keep student achievement at the forefront of employee focus (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). The Virginia Department of Education indicated that student achievement should be at the heart of the student achievement goal (Virginia Department of Education, 2018). Through the changes required by The Every Student Succeeds Act to school accreditation, which includes non-academic indicators, assistant principals have used the SOA to build the student achievement goal for their performance evaluation.

In addressing the student achievement goal, the movement in ESSA was away from mandated, inflexible, multiple-choice tests and toward fewer assessments that allowed for ingenuity. This flexibility continued to the student achievement goal as well (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). Employee evaluations at all levels were to be used to move beyond those standardized tests and focus on ingenuity in improving student achievement for students (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). For schools that have been fully accredited by the Standards of Accreditation, this would be an opportunity for principals and assistant principals to take risks with new education practice and to develop tools to further strengthen the scholastic achievement of students beyond standardized tests (Huggins et al., 2017). However, the results of this study do not indicate that assistant principals are moving far beyond those metrics. Among the 197 assistant principals who used an SOA metric, 143 or 72.6% of those reported using a specific goal related to the standardized test performance. For the 143 participants, 87.4% of the participants knew they were fully accredited schools and did not have substantial work to do on school accreditation and so could have afforded to be bolder on

student achievement goals for all students. Close et al. (2019) found that two-thirds of state departments of education around the country believed that local educational agency control was a strength of their evaluation system under ESSA, however, this study finds that local educational agencies are still using the same metrics.

Policy implications. The Virginia Department of Education has an opportunity to restructure the use of student achievement goals in performance evaluations so that assistant principals can use research to choose goals that represent progress in student achievement. This would be achieved not just by lowering the value of the student achievement goal in performance evaluations, which is under consideration, but also providing a structure where the goal is more meaningful to the assistant principal. In this study, 34.2% of assistant principals indicated that the student achievement goal did not make them feel more effective at their job. There are assistant principals in Virginia who feel that they have a goal for the sake of having a goal, not for direction, focus or professional improvement – a low sense of professional agency. If the assistant principal is not connecting job efficacy to the student achievement goal, then the goal is not moving student achievement and we cannot use that goal to determine if the assistant principal is doing the job well. As is implied through Saclarides and Lubienski's study on instructional coaches, effectively evaluating the work of an educational personnel is complex and because the ultimate goal of assistant principals is student learning by relying so heavily on student achievement, this overshadows the work the assistant principals do with teachers instead of students (2020). The Virginia Department of Education as well as local educational agencies have an opportunity, when they are fully

accredited, to reward creativity and progressiveness in increasing student achievement and finding the connections between our student's achievements and their preparedness for their post-secondary choices.

This research found that 71.8% of the assistant principals who were working at a school that was fully accredited had a student achievement goal in their performance evaluation that related to the standards of accreditation. In this regard, Virginia's assistant principals are staying the course in terms of test scores and accountability and not breaking new ground (Burnette, 2015). There is a policy opportunity for the Virginia Department of Education to structure the performance evaluation of schools that are fully accredited differently from those that are accredited with conditions or denied accreditation. In fact, there could be a different evaluation for each of the three tiers for the purposes of encouraging progress in measuring different types of student achievement and student learning.

Research implications. The primary research implication would be to determine why assistant principals are evaluated - to evaluate based on the job they are doing versus evaluating against the promotion to the principalship or is the evaluation set to be reflective or punitive, how the student achievement goal can be used to focus on the professional development of the assistant principals, the job tasks of the assistant principal as related to the evaluation, and how the assistant principal job tasks focus on instructional leadership. The purpose of personnel evaluation in education has not been clearly defined but has been used to provide feedback for professional development (Donaldson & Mavrogordato, 2018). The inclusion of the student achievement goal

could provide focus for the professional development of the assistant principal, but it would have to be structured differently, and likely must account for less of the overall evaluation score to encourage risk. Future research should also include why the assistant principals who are serving a fully accredited school have chosen an SOA related student achievement goal. Researchers would be able to explore how close the school is to losing the state accreditation in those areas the assistant principal has used for the student achievement goal. This survey does not explain the need to focus on an area if accreditation might be in doubt in the future.

Performance Evaluations and Job Tasks

The research of Marshall and Hooley (2006) and Barnett et al. (2102) demonstrate the understanding of the assistant principal job tasks to be managerial and disciplinary in nature. Although the assistant principals in those studies welcomed the idea of being an instructional leader, not much opportunity was provided. Among the participants of this study 22.7% of the assistant principals reported that their goal was based on a curriculum area or grade level for which they were not directly responsible – indicating no opportunity to be an instructional leader over the area in which they were evaluated. They were working toward a goal to which they were not able to influence factors around student achievement. The influence over areas in which they were responsible was worsened if the assistant principal shared a goal with other assistant principals in their school. Education personnel want to have control over the areas in their evaluation and they want it to showcase their best work and in evaluating through student achievement, assistant principals (like other non-classroom educators) will pick the best option not

necessarily the option where their work should be focused (Saclarides & Lubienski, 2020). Among the assistant principals who did not have another assistant principal serving in the building with them, a full 50% reported having the same goal as the other administrators in the building – indicating only a principal left in which they had the same student achievement goal but not the same job description. This would indicate a misalignment of the job tasks to the goal for either or both positions. Barnett et al. (2012) acknowledge principal and teacher evaluations center around student growth but because of the nature of the job tasks of the assistant principal, evaluation should be different. Harvey (1994) agrees for a distributive leadership model, however in the model presented, the assistant principal is left to whatever the principal assigns. In addition, Colwell (2015) would indicate that a shared goal would be a principal-assistant principal team with a shared mission, vision and work that would build a leadership team that would share the work and prevent leadership loneliness.

Assistant principals in this study also reported a length of time in the position. Most specifically, this study looked at the number of assistant principals who assumed the role after the implementation of the student achievement goal in the performance evaluation and those who held the role prior. A majority, 56.8% of the assistant principals who participated in this study, came to the position within the last five years – after the implementation of the student achievement goal. The quantitative analysis did not find any significant relationship between the length of service and the inclusion of the student achievement goal, however, the analysis of the cross-tabulation indicated that there was a difference in the focus of the student achievement goal. The longer the

assistant principal was in the position, the more likely they were to focus on specific curriculum related goals – mostly in mathematics. Less experienced assistant principals were more likely to focus on general overall goals or absenteeism – areas where more influence could be felt by the managerial and disciplinary nature of the job that assistant principals have reported in previous research (Barnett et al., 2012). Despite the flexibility provided to states and local educational agencies in ESSA, we see little use of student learning objectives as a measure of student achievement goals of the assistant principal participants (Close et al., 2019).

This study also sought to understand if there was a relationship between the inclusion of the student achievement goal and a level of efficacy the assistant principal may report. There was no relationship using a chi-square analysis, but a qualitative review of the data indicated the inclusion of the student achievement goal in their performance evaluation provided them with more focus resulting in making them feel more effective. This desire for more focus and clarity around the work is reinforced by previous research that has indicated that the assistant principal job description and tasks do not match (Barnett et al., 2012). This indicates that a clearer understanding of the job of the assistant principal is still needed (Marshall & Hooley, 2006).

In addition, from Stronge (2012) and Marzano et al. (2005) the hiring of teachers is the one of the most powerful factors for student achievement – yet 75.8% of the assistant principals in this study had any influence in the hiring of teachers they supervise – and of those who did, most had very little influence. No assistant principals reported having ultimate authority over the hiring of teachers. As we understand from research

presented by Soehner and Ryan (2011), the teacher in the classroom is the single greatest factor in student achievement within the school. With little influence over the choices that are made to place teachers in a classroom, the assistant principal has lost the greatest factor to raising student achievement.

Policy implications. Assistant principals in this study who have served for less time were more focused on non-instructional student achievement goals. It was found that 56.8% of the assistant principals in this survey assumed the role within the last five years. Previous research indicates that when school leadership turns over (the previous principals went on to other positions, in some cases a principalship in another building or a central office role) student achievement suffers (Marzano et al., 2005). Better policy structures would permit more assistant principal positions to be available so that as turnover occurs there is some consistency in leadership for the teachers and the students. This was a policy recommendation made in 2020 by the Virginia Department of Education but not taken up by the General Assembly. This follows the research of Oleszewski et al. (2012), which indicates that a leadership team focused on bolstering student achievement is best served by a clear structure of distributed leadership. The Virginia Department of Education could make new policy regarding the preparation programs of school leaders. As the change in student achievement goals being included in the performance evaluation occurred, the preparation programs should also adjust to reflect the changes to those aspiring to the positions. This would include coursework in instructional leadership but also in how to help personnel establish and track progress to a goal. The change in how school leaders are taught and trained to evaluate and

provide feedback to instructional and leadership personnel in schools should be addressed by the Virginia Department of Education.

Research implications. Oleszewski et al. (2012) concluded in their study that the role of the assistant principal must be better defined and that it should not be as flexible, it should not change from one year to the next, and there should be a leadership team with clearly distributed leadership roles. Harvey (1994) also indicated that the assistant principal should not just be left with whatever the principal assigns or is willing to delegate. Research that follows from these findings, in parallel with principals, should be the listing of the job description, job tasks completed by assistant principals, and performance evaluation that measures the success of the assistant principal in mastering tasks of the job. This would likely lead to policy changes that include the idea that educators not in the classroom should be evaluated based on their impact in influences the teachers in the building not based on direct student achievement (Saclarides & Lubienski, 2020). The results of this study and previous research indicate that the assistant principal role is often ill defined and that even experienced holders of the position feel only marginally more prepared for the instructional leadership tasks that come with being held accountable for student achievement. Does this change when the career plans of the assistant principal are taken into consideration? Should this change how the assistant principal is evaluated for promotion? Future research could provide information that would lead to the division of personnel evaluations between the assistant principals and principals. It may be critical to acknowledge that some parts of each job only exist within that position.

Future research should also investigate why more experienced assistant principals feel more prepared for instructional leadership. There are many questions around job efficacy for the assistant principal, including how it relates to a particular school's hierarchy, mastery of job tasks, or as previous research might indicate a longer period of time in the classroom prior to being in the position. This could be done as a phenomenological study of the assistant principals in their lived experiences or as a self-study on their professional goals and their impact on student learning. Future research should also examine the assistant principal's job tasks and evaluations using a distributive leadership model to examine how job tasks among assistant principals in the same school or across many schools in the same district use the job tasks and then the evaluation and feedback provided to the assistant principals. In addition, a critical theory study on the power struggle of the assistant principal and its impact on the individual in the position.

The Virginia Department of Education (2012) defines the responsibility of the principal to "foster the success of all students by developing, advocacy, and sustaining an academically rigorous, positive and safe school climate for all stakeholders." One area that can be linked to providing this school environment is in the hiring of teachers. The hiring of teachers to serve on a curriculum or grade level team can cause culture in a school to shift. In reviewing the results of this study, in the most cases, assistant principals participated in the hiring of teachers with various stakeholders. Future research can be conducted to determine how this distributive leadership effects student achievement and whether all the stakeholders should hold the same goal, but then have the feedback and other factors tailored to their professional responsibilities and job tasks.

Influences on the Assistant Principal and Student Achievement Goal

This study did not identify many areas of relationships between the topic of the student achievement goal and the different influences on the assistant principal. As reported in the results, there were only two influences that resulted in a significant relationship with the student achievement goal topic reported. The first is between the level of school the assistant principal was assigned to and the student achievement goal topic. Elementary or middle school assistant principals were more likely to be focused on English reading and writing, while high school assistant principals were more likely to report a focus on absenteeism. The other influence that was determined to have a relationship with the student achievement goal topic was the school district location. These two areas provide additional questions to be studied, including how the job tasks of the assistant principals change among the levels of school or the location of schools. Are some assistant principals in different locations or levels of schooling able to focus more on instructional leadership and if so, why? Previous research on the assistant principal does not address level or location of the school as factors of influence on the role of the assistant principal.

This study found no relationship between the length of time participants served as an assistant principal and their feeling of efficacy around their student achievement goal. Evaluating a new assistant principal may be different than an assistant principal who has been in the role longer. The longer an assistant principal is in the role, they may feel the goal makes them more effective as an instructional leader because the goal gives them direction to their work. Barnett et al. (2012) reported that although we have not followed

assistant principal longitudinally in the past, assistant principals at different times in grade have reported that they were all challenged by workload and task management, student issues, parent issues, teacher and staff issues, however Huggins et al. (2017) reported the longer they served they were building capacity to fulfill the duties of instructional leadership.

The research regarding the evaluation of the assistant principal is scant. Rousmaniere (1997) tied the connection of evaluation between the principal and teacher; but there is no research on the connection of evaluation between the principal and assistant principal. Therefore, the study of the areas in which the principal evaluation has had an effect, although indirect, on student achievement resides with Marzano et al. (2005). These authors found the most prominent area where principals have the most effect on student achievement is in school culture. This was defined by Marzano et al. (2005) as building trust that allows relationships among the adults to flourish. Although this study did not ask specifically about school culture or trust between the principal and assistant principal, the professional development that assistant principals received about performance evaluations came from their principals – 47.6% reported that is where they learned how to participate in the performance evaluation. Furthermore, 79.5% of the assistant principals reported that they established the performance evaluation goals with their principals. If an assistant principal is developing their understanding of the process and the area for evaluation with the same person, does the assistant principal have any agency over their student achievement goal? Is this a function of distributive leadership?

Policy implication. The Virginia Department of Education has an opportunity to provide guidance regarding how the employee performance standards are implemented in different school systems. The Virginia Department of Education did provide research behind the change to the employee evaluation and did provide flexibility in what indicators the school district adopted to provide examples for evaluation, but they did not provide guidance on what may be useful to include beyond the major categories. In addition, smaller school districts generally adopted the performance manual without any modifications, instead of providing a school district tailored document. Many the larger school districts tailored the document to their needs. The implementation of this policy was left to the school district to finance. The VDOE could have provided funds and professional development to smaller school districts so that they might be better positioned to use the performance evaluations to inform their own needs as well as those of the employee.

If the VDOE as well as local educational agencies use the personnel evaluations for the purposes of raising student achievement as the primary focus of school administrators and school improvement plans throughout the state, then additional policy changes will need to be made once more research is conducted on if the assistant principals are measuring strong student achievement goals (Bryk & Schneider, 2002). The policies regarding the qualifications to be licensed as an assistant principal may need to change.

Research implications. Numerous questions are raised by this study, many of which may be important to investigate in future research. If the principal is providing

both the professional development around how to produce a student achievement goal and the evaluation of the results, is do we have a fair process in place? Is it an objective evaluation designed for employee performance improvement? In examining how well assistant principals feel they are able to provide instructional leadership, future research could be conducted on a longitudinal basis to determine if an assistant principal who has been in the same position and same school over time feels a greater sense of efficacy in that area of professional work. What inhibits or promote growth in instructional leadership for the assistant principal?

If the assistant principal's role is changing from managerial and political to instructional leadership, then future research should also include the process for how school districts select assistant principals. Mazzeo (2003) states that school leadership is important to the improvement of student academic achievement. How are assistant principals initially chosen and how do they get promoted? What are the qualifications among the local educational agencies? Do they vary among those local educational agencies that perform well on standards of accreditation versus those that underperform?

Conclusion

Even as this study answered questions about assistant principals' student achievement goals, it identified many more questions that can be explored. One of the challenges faced in analysis was how to code the student achievement goals that the assistant principals reported. Unexpectedly, the student achievement goals were narrowly focused on the new standards of accreditation. The U.S. Department of Education and the Virginia Department of Education clearly states that student

achievement goals only needed to be related to accreditation if the school is not accredited and on an improvement plan. Most schools in this study were accredited, yet most student achievement goals were related to accreditation. Given that only a few schools in this survey achieved less than full accreditation, it would be expected that assistant principals would have identified differentiated topics based on school specific criteria. It is possible that the assistant principals were providing a goal for the performance evaluation that just completed a requirement and gave direction for something they were already working on. That could be further discovered with a future study that dives deeper into the student achievement goal.

This study had many areas of interest that will need further examination. In completing this study, the answer of job tasks for the assistant principal in a post-ESSA era of education policy has not been addressed. As the advertisements and applications for new assistant principals are posted for the upcoming school year, issues of preparedness, expectations, turnover, distributive leadership and evaluation persist.

To address the issues of the assistant principal, the first step is for the Virginia Department of Education to commission a statewide study on assistant principals. The focus of this study should be to develop job descriptions, job tasks, and aligned evaluation processes for assistant principals. The use of the plural in these areas is not a mistake but the acknowledgement that this survey found that there is a need for differentiation based on school district location, level of school, the accreditation of the school per ESSA, and the career aspirations of the individual holding the position. As educators, there is an emphasis on differentiation for students and there should be

differentiation for the development of the educational leaders to demonstrate commitment to meeting everyone where they are and demonstrating growth – the premise of the policy.

Upon completion of the research study needed to inform policy recommendations, the state should act by publishing a set of job descriptions each with matching job tasks and evaluation and provide local educational agencies with the flexibility allowed for in ESSA. Independent of these findings the Virginia Department of Education should ask the General Assembly to implement the following policy recommendations. For non-classroom educators the term ‘Student Achievement Goal’ should be changed to ‘Performance Goal.’ This semantic change would provide for an opportunity of a mind-set change around setting a goal for performance evaluation. As Saclarides and Lubienski (2020) demonstrated, for non-classroom educators their focus is of their direct impact is among the adults in the building not the students. This provides the non-classroom educator with a feeling of agency and control over that which they are being evaluated upon. This would also allow VDOE to continue to use the work of Stronge (2012) to defend their use of performance goals because his work relies heavily on research that demonstrates the way leadership has an indirect impact on student achievement. Under ESSA, VDOE has the flexibility to use a lower percentage for goals in educational personnel evaluations. The lowering of the percentage of the goal in the evaluation will promote risk in seeking new education ground (Close et al., 2019). Risk-taking is essential for our school leadership teams so that implementation of new techniques, skills, and curriculum could be implemented without the fear that failure will

be unrecoverable (Colwell, 2015). This reduction would also provide for an evaluation that was based in reflection and improvement not in the punitive use of the evaluations, thus moving education forward for the neediest students (Close et al., 2019).

The position of assistant principal is unique in that it is the most understudied position within a school but also because it represents entry-level management. Principals will participate in the rhetoric of looking for an instructional leader who can mentor teachers and provide insights into curriculum and instruction, but principals rely on assistant principals to provide more rudimentary managerial guidance to the school. In the end, any employee who is part of team that influences the outcome of our nation's most prized possession – our students – is worthy of our research focus.

Appendix A



Informed Consent

A Survey of Virginia Assistant Principals' Influences and Choice of Student Achievement Goals in Performance Evaluations

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

RESEARCH PROCEDURES

This research is being conducted to understand the process assistant principals use to determine the student achievement goal used in performance evaluation. If you agree to participate, you will be asked to answer survey questions about your personal demographics, the demographics of your school, your student achievement goal, and how you were provided information about how to choose your student achievement goal in your performance evaluation. The survey will take approximately 15 minutes to complete.

RISKS

There are no foreseeable risks for participating in this research.

BENEFITS

There are no benefits to you as a participant other than to further research in how assistant principals set their student achievement goals for their performance evaluation.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The data in this study will be confidential. In the pilot survey names will be redacted and only known to the researchers. For participants in the state-wide survey, no individual names, school names or school districts will be collected to identify participants. While it is understood that no computer transmission can be perfectly secure, reasonable efforts will be made to protect the confidentiality of your transmission. Identifiers may be

removed from the data and the de-identified data could be used for future research without additional consent from participants.

PARTICIPATION

Your participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study at any time and for any reason. If you decide not to participate or if you withdraw from the study, there is no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. There are no costs to you or any other party. Please complete this survey outside of your prescribed work hours. If you choose to complete this survey during work hours, please obtain permission from your supervisor.

CONTACT

This research is being conducted Dr. Nancy Holincheck in the College of Education and Human Development and Kathleen Kraus-Zadrozny, doctoral candidate in the College of Education and Human Development at George Mason University. Dr. Holincheck may be reached at nholinch@gmu.edu or 703-993-8136 and Ms. Kraus-Zadrozny may be reached at kkrausza@gmu.edu or 703-786-3576 for questions or to report a research-related problem. You may contact the George Mason University Institutional Review Board office at 703-993-4121 if you have questions or comments regarding your rights as a participant in the research.

This research has been reviewed according to George Mason University procedures governing your participation in this research. The IRB number for this project is IRBNet number: 1285454-1

CONSENT

I have read this form, all of my questions have been answered by the research staff, and I agree to participate in this study.

_____ I agree to have my responses for this survey included in the analysis of data for researching purposes.

_____ I DO NOT agree to have my responses for this survey included in the analysis of data for researching purposes.

Appendix B

Electronic Mail Scripts

Script for email to participants five days before opening survey:

Hi,

My name is Kathleen Kraus-Zadrozny. I am a doctoral student in the College of Education and Human Development at George Mason University. I am writing to request your participation in my dissertation research. My dissertation focuses on how assistant principals across Virginia set their student achievement goal for evaluation, internal and external factors that influence goal setting and how their goal relates to the job tasks of assistant principals in established research. This research study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board at George Mason University. Later this week you will receive an email from me with a link to an online survey that will take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete.

The survey is completely confidential. Neither your administrators nor I will know whether you participate, and your answers cannot be linked to your name in any way. Although, you are not required to complete the survey; I am hoping that you will. Your response will strengthen the quality of the study and will not be able to complete my dissertation without your help. It is my hope that this dissertation is the first in a series of studies that will help shape public policy around the topics of my dissertation.

If you complete the online survey and submit your email address at the end of it (a separate link), then your email address will be placed in a drawing for one of the ten \$50 Amazon gift certificates. Thanks for reading this email and please be on the lookout for my next email with the link to the survey.

Thank you for considering participation in my survey.

Sincerely,

Kathleen Kraus-Zadrozny

Script for email requesting participation in online survey:

Dear Assistant Principal,

Thank you for reading this email and considering participation in the online survey to help me complete my dissertation. My dissertation focuses on how assistant principals across Virginia set their student achievement goal for evaluation, internal and external factors that influence goal setting and how their goal relates to the job tasks of assistant principals in established research. This study is important because it will provide a clearer picture of how student achievement goals are being set by assistant principals and how those goals relate to daily work. Research around these topics is important to provide high quality evaluations for assistant principals that promote good reflective practice and professional development as you continue your career. This is a statewide survey of Assistant Principals across Virginia.

This research study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board at George Mason University. Please use the IRB Reference Number: IRBNet number: 1285454-1 when contacting George Mason about this study. When you are ready to complete the survey please follow the link below. The online survey should take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete.

The survey can be accessed at: https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/Virginia_AP_survey.

Your name and email address will not be connected in any way to the survey. Your responses will be completely confidential.

If you have any questions, please contact me at kkrausza@gmu.edu. Thank you.

Sincerely,
Kathleen Kraus-Zadrozny

Script for follow-up email requesting participation in online survey:

Dear Assistant Principal,

This email is a final reminder requesting your participation in the online survey for my dissertation. The survey will be closed in a few days. The survey will take 10-15 minutes to complete, your responses will be confidential.

Thank you to those of you who have already completed the survey, I appreciate your help regarding this important work. If you have not completed the survey but are ready to please follow the link below.

[https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/Virginia AP survey](https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/Virginia_AP_survey)

If you have any questions, please contact me at kkrausza@gmu.edu.

Thank you,

Kathleen Kraus-Zadrozny

Appendix C

Survey Questions

This survey has been prepared to find out how you feel about developing student achievement goals in your personnel evaluation. Please fill in the answer which indicates the best choice or description of how you implement the process for choosing your student achievement goal.

1. How long have you been an assistant principal?
 - a. 1 – 5 years
 - b. 6-10 years
 - c. 11+ years

2. At what level of education are you an assistant principal?
 - a. Elementary (PK-5 or PK-6)
 - b. Middle (6-8 or 7-8)
 - c. High (9-10)
 - d. Other (blank here)

3. Prior to becoming an assistant principal, how long were you a teacher?
 - a. 5 years or fewer
 - b. 6-10 years
 - c. 11+ years

4. What is your gender?
 - a. Male
 - b. Female
 - c. Prefer not to respond

5. How would you describe your school district?
 - a. Urban
 - b. Rural
 - c. Suburban
 - d. Small city
 - e. Other (Blank for description)

6. Using the map included, please indicate in which VDOE region of Virginia your current school is located? (Drop down menu with numbers)



7. What was the student achievement goal(s) of the school in which you are serving as an assistant principal during the 2017-2018?
8. What is your most recent (current) Student Achievement Goal for performance evaluation?
9. What were your reasons for choosing your most recent (current) Student Achievement Goal for performance evaluation?
10. Do you have the same student achievement goal as the other assistant principals at your school?
- Yes
 - No
 - There are no additional Assistant Principals at my school.
11. With whom (if anyone) do you choose your Student Achievement Goal for your performance evaluation? (Check those that apply.)
- Your Principal
 - Your fellow Assistant Principals
 - Teachers who you supervise
 - I set my own Student Achievement Goal
 - Other (blank for fill in)
12. Is your goal based on a curriculum area or grade level for which you are directly responsible?
- Yes
 - No
 - Other (blank for fill in)

13. Do you receive guidance from anyone (centrally or locally) regarding your Student Achievement Goal?
- Employee Performance Manual
 - Direct Supervisor (Principal, etc.)
 - Central Office Professional Development Session
 - I am required to determine how to set the goal myself without training.
 - Other (blank for fill in)
14. Within the course of your daily duties, what specific activities help you reach your student achievement goal?
15. How much influence do you have over the hiring process of teachers you supervise?
- I am the sole decision maker regarding the hiring of teachers I supervise.
 - I am the initial interview with the prospective teacher, however, my principal (or other administrator) has the final say on teacher hiring.
 - I am the administrator involved in the hiring process, however, other stakeholders (such as department chairs) have input on who gets hired.
 - I have no input regarding the hiring process of teachers whom I supervise.
 - Other (blank for fill in).
16. Describe the teacher hiring process at your school.
17. What are your career plans?
- I want to become a Principal.
 - I want to work in Central Office.
 - I want to continue to be an Assistant Principal for the foreseeable future.
 - I have not decided what I want to do next.
 - Other (blank that could be filled in)

18. The accreditation of your school by the VDOE is listed as:
- a. Fully Accredited
 - b. Accredited with conditions
 - c. Accreditation denied
 - d. To be determined
 - e. I don't know
19. The percentage of the students at your school who are on free and reduced lunch is:
- a. 0% - 10%
 - b. 11% - 20%
 - c. 21% - 30%
 - d. 31% - 40%
 - e. 41% - 50%
 - f. 51% - 75%
 - g. 76%-100%
20. The percentage of the students at your school who are English Language Learners (ESOL Levels 1-5) is:
- a. 0%-10%
 - b. 11%-20%
 - c. 21%-30%
 - d. 31%-40%
 - e. 41%-50%
 - f. 51%-75%
 - g. 76%-100%

Questions 21 and 22 will have their own page.

21. Do you believe the use of the student achievement goal in your performance evaluation makes you a more effective assistant principal?

22. Why?

23. Are there issues or factors other than those listed above that influenced your goal?

Appendix D

Letter to those piloting the survey

Dear <name>,

Thank you for volunteering to help pilot the attached survey. It is part of the data collection process for my dissertation. Your feedback on the attached survey will help make this survey as clear as possible for the assistant principal who will be taking the survey and will also help generate valuable results for my study. This survey will examine the practices of assistant principals throughout Virginia as each sets a student achievement goal for the personnel evaluation.

Please review the attached survey questions and responses. In addition to answering the survey questions, please offer suggestions and comments about the following issues:

1. Are the survey questions easy to understand? Is it clear what each question is asking? Why or why not?
2. Do the available response options allow you to answer each question? Why or why not? Are there additional response options I should consider?
3. Are there questions you think I should be asking?
4. Do you have any recommendations for what might motivate an assistant principal in Virginia to complete this survey?
5. Is there anything else you want to share with me about this survey that would help

me improve it?

Thank you for your help.

Appendix E

Coding Manual for Question Analysis of the Assistant Principal Survey

This manual contains the processes for coding each of the survey questions from the Assistant Principal Personnel Evaluation survey for this study.

1. How long have you been an assistant principal?

- a. 1 – 5 years
- b. 6-10 years
- c. 11+ years

Coded: A. 1-5 years, B 6-10 years, C 11+years

Recorded: A. 1-5 years, B 6-10 years and 11+years

2. At what level of education are you an assistant principal?

- a. Elementary (PK-5 or PK-6)
- b. Middle (6-8 or 7-8)
- c. High (9-10)
- d. Other (blank here)

Coded: A. Elementary (PK -5 or PK-6), B Middle (6-8 or 7-8), C. High (9-10)

3. Prior to becoming an assistant principal, how long were you a teacher?

- a. 5 years or fewer
- b. 6-10 years
- c. 11+ years

Coded: A. 5 years or fewer, B. 6-10 years, C. 11+ years

4. What is your gender?
- a. Male
 - b. Female
 - c. Prefer not to respond

Coded: A. Male, B. Female, C. Prefer not to respond

5. How would you describe your school district?
- a. Urban
 - b. Rural
 - c. Suburban
 - d. Small city
 - e. Other (Blank for description)

Coded: A. Urban, B. Rural, C. Suburban, D. Small City, E. Mix

6. Using the map included, please indicate in which VDOE region of Virginia your current school is located? (Drop down menu with numbers)



Coded: by region 1-8

Recoded: by geography 1&2 into southeast, 3&5 into central, 4 stayed as northern, and 6, 7, & 8 became the southwest.

7. What was the student achievement goal(s) of the school in which you are serving as an assistant principal during the 2017-2018?

Initially coded: to determine SOA: A. SOA, B. non-SOA

Recoded: into SOA Categories:

| Code Letter | Theme | Count |
|-------------|------------------------------------|-------|
| A | English Overall | 21 |
| B | Math Overall | 13 |
| C | Science | 7 |
| D | English Subgroup Performance | 18 |
| E | Math Subgroup Performance | 17 |
| F | Chronic Absenteeism | 16 |
| G | Graduation Rate/Drop Out | 6 |
| H | College and Career Readiness | 6 |
| I | Generic Reference | 26 |
| J | Combination of SOL Subgroup Scores | 47 |
| K | Combination of SOL Overall Scores | 20 |
| L | Non-SOA Goals | 76 |

Recorded: non-SOA Categories:

| Category | Topics | Count |
|----------------------------------|--|-------|
| Promoting Student Achievement | History Performance | 5 |
| | Overall Student Achievement | 3 |
| | Grades | 4 |
| | Retentions | 2 |
| Student and Community Engagement | Extracurricular Activities | 3 |
| | PBIS | 6 |
| | Student Feedback | 1 |
| | Social and Emotional Skills | 1 |
| | Reduction in Discipline | 5 |
| | Referrals | |
| | Communication | 1 |
| Teacher Development | Reading Strategies | 12 |
| | Instructional Strategies | 14 |
| | Professional Development | 2 |
| | Computer Integration | 1 |
| | Math Strategies | 3 |
| | Peer Observations | 3 |
| | PLC Meetings | 3 |
| | Vertical Articulations | 1 |
| | Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) | 2 |
| | Writing Strategies | 2 |
| Compliance | Special Education Paperwork | 2 |

8. What is your most recent (current) Student Achievement Goal for performance evaluation?

Coded to determine SOA: A. SOA, B. non-SOA

Recoded: into SOA Categories:

| Code Letter | Theme | Count |
|-------------|------------------------------------|-------|
| A | English Overall | 21 |
| B | Math Overall | 13 |
| C | Science | 7 |
| D | English Subgroup Performance | 18 |
| E | Math Subgroup Performance | 17 |
| F | Chronic Absenteeism | 16 |
| G | Graduation Rate/Drop Out | 6 |
| H | College and Career Readiness | 6 |
| I | Generic Reference | 26 |
| J | Combination of SOL Subgroup Scores | 47 |
| K | Combination of SOL Overall Scores | 20 |
| L | Non-SOA Goals | 76 |

Recoded: non-SOA Categories:

| Category | Topics | Count |
|----------------------------------|--|-------|
| Promoting Student Achievement | History Performance | 5 |
| | Overall Student Achievement | 3 |
| | Grades | 4 |
| | Retentions | 2 |
| Student and Community Engagement | Extracurricular Activities | 3 |
| | PBIS | 6 |
| | Student Feedback | 1 |
| | Social and Emotional Skills | 1 |
| | Reduction in Discipline | 5 |
| | Referrals | |
| | Communication | 1 |
| Teacher Development | Reading Strategies | 12 |
| | Instructional Strategies | 14 |
| | Professional Development | 2 |
| | Computer Integration | 1 |
| | Math Strategies | 3 |
| | Peer Observations | 3 |
| | PLC Meetings | 3 |
| | Vertical Articulations | 1 |
| | Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) | 2 |
| | Writing Strategies | 2 |
| Compliance | Special Education Paperwork | 2 |

9. What were your reasons for choosing your most recent (current) Student Achievement Goal for performance evaluation?

This response was not coded but used for qualitative purposes.

10. Do you have the same student achievement goal as the other assistant principals at your school?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. There are no additional Assistant Principals at my school.

Coded: A. Yes, B. No, C. There are no additional Assistant Principals at my school. D. No Answer.

11. With whom (if anyone) do you choose your Student Achievement Goal for your performance evaluation? (Check those that apply.)

- i. Your Principal
- ii. Your fellow Assistant Principals
- iii. Teachers who you supervise
- iv. I set my own Student Achievement Goal
- v. Other (blank for fill in)

Coded: A. Your Principal, B. Your fellow Assistant Principals, C. Teachers who you supervise, D. I set my own Student Achievement Goal, E. Principals and Teachers, F. Leadership, G. All of the Above. H. No Answer.

12. Is your goal based on a curriculum area or grade level for which you are directly responsible?

- i. Yes
- ii. No
- iii. Other (blank for fill in)

Coded: A. Yes, B. No, C. Schoolwide, D. Partial, E. No answer

13. Do you receive guidance from anyone (centrally or locally) regarding your Student Achievement Goal?

- a. Employee Performance Manual
- b. Direct Supervisor (Principal, etc.)
- c. Central Office Professional Development Session
- d. I am required to determine how to set the goal myself without training.
- e. Other (blank for fill in)

Coded: A. Employee Performance Manual, B. Direct Supervisor (Principal, etc.), C. Central Office Professional Development Session, D. I am required to determine how to set the goal myself without training, E. Other combinations of the first four.

14. Within the course of your daily duties, what specific activities help you reach your student achievement goal?

This response was not coded but used for qualitative purposes.

15. How much influence do you have over the hiring process of teachers you supervise?

- a. I am the sole decision maker regarding the hiring of teachers I supervise.
- b. I am the initial interview with the prospective teacher, however, my principal (or other administrator) has the final say on teacher hiring.
- c. I am the administrator involved in the hiring process, however, other stakeholders (such as department chairs) have input on who gets hired.
- d. I have no input regarding the hiring process of teachers whom I supervise.
- e. Other (blank for fill in).

Coded: A. I am the sole decision maker regarding the hiring of teachers I supervise, B. I am the initial interview with the prospective teacher, however, my principal (or other administrator) has the final say on teacher hiring, C. I am the administrator involved in the hiring process, however, other stakeholders (such as department chairs) have input on who gets hired, D. I have no input regarding the hiring process of teachers whom I supervise. E. The principal and me or Leadership Team, F. No Answer, G. Very Little Input, H. I have more responsibility.

Recoded: Using the descriptions in question 16, I was able to move E to B, G to C and H to B.

16. Describe the teacher hiring process at your school.

This response was not coded but used for qualitative purposes.

17. What are your career plans?
- a. I want to become a Principal.
 - b. I want to work in Central Office.
 - c. I want to continue to be an Assistant Principal for the foreseeable future.
 - d. I have not decided what I want to do next.
 - e. Other (blank that could be filled in)

Coded: A. I want to become a Principal, B. I want to work in Central Office, C. I want to continue to be an Assistant Principal for the foreseeable future, D. I have not decided what I want to do next. E. Retire or retire and do something else like teach at a university, F. No Answer.

18. The accreditation of your school by the VDOE is listed as:

- a. Fully Accredited
- b. Accredited with conditions
- c. Accreditation denied
- d. To be determined
- e. I don't know

Coded: A. Fully Accredited, B. Accredited with Conditions, C. Accreditation Denied, D. Unknown.

19. The percentage of the students at your school who are on free and reduced lunch is:

- a. 0% - 10%
- b. 11% - 20%
- c. 21% - 30%
- d. 31% - 40%
- e. 41% - 50%
- f. 51% - 75%
- g. 76%-100%

Coded: A. 0% - 10%, B. 11% - 20%, C. 21% - 30%, D. 31% - 40%, E. 41% - 50%, F. 51% - 75%, G. 76%-100%

20. The percentage of the students at your school who are English Language Learners (ESOL Levels 1-5) is:

- a. 0%-10%
- b. 1%-20%
- c. 21%-30%
- d. 31%-40%
- e. 41%-50%
- f. 51%-75%
- g. 76%-100%

Coded: A. 0%-10%, B. 11%-20%, C. 21%-30%, D. 31%-40%, E. 41%-50%, F. 51%-75%, G. 76%-100%

Questions 21 and 22 will have their own page.

21. Do you believe the use of the student achievement goal in your performance evaluation makes you a more effective assistant principal?

Coded: A. Yes, B. No, C. Unsure

22. Why?

This response was not coded but used for qualitative purposes.

23. Are there issues or factors other than those listed above that influenced your goal?

This response was not coded but used for qualitative purposes.

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Biography

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